The New Germans: symphonic poem and music drama

Lecture 10 | Music in the Classical and Romantic Eras MCGY2612

16 May 2011

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THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Cosima, Wagner, Liszt, Hans von Wolzogen in Wahnfried
W. Beckmann (1882)

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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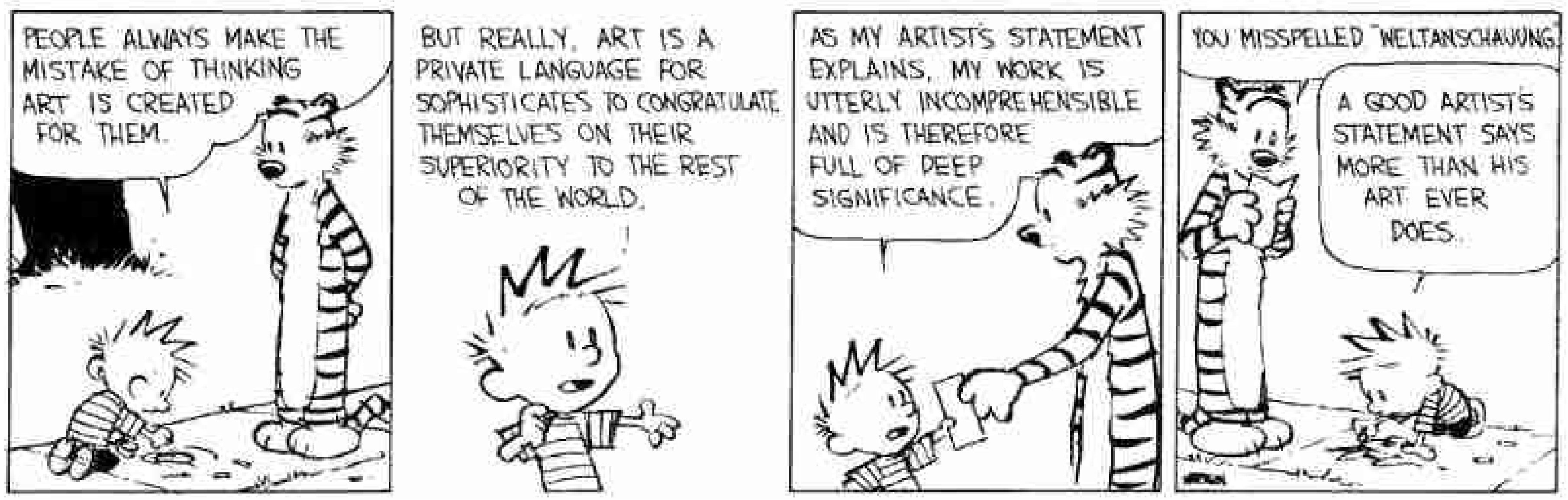
WHO WERE THE NEW GERMANS?

Die neudeutsche Schule (New German School)

- Name: Coined by Franz Brendel (editor of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*) at the first conference of German musicians *(Tonkünstler-Versammlung)* in Leipzig in 1859
- Spiritual leaders: Wagner, Liszt and Berlioz (the latter two weren't German, incidentally). Lesser figures included Felix Draeseke, Peter Cornelius, Joachim Raff, Richard Pohl, Hans von Bülow)
- Related terms: *Zukunftsmusiker, Zukunftsmusik* (musicians/music of the future) – initially terms of abuse used by opponents, adopted by Liszt and Wagner as self-designations. Also *Fortschritts-partei* (progressive party)
- Opposition: A manifesto published in the *Berliner Musik-Zeitung* in 1860, signed by Brahms, Joachim and others, protested that the compositions of the 'so-called New German School [are] contrary to the innermost spirit of music, [and] strongly to be deplored and condemned'

ARTISTS' EXPLANATIONS



LISZT ON SYMPHONIC COMPOSITION 1855

- The poetic solution of instrumental music contained in the programme seems to us one of the various steps forward which the art has still to take, a necessary result of the development of our time, than a symptom of its exhaustion and decadence (1166)
- Music in its masterpieces tends more and more to appropriate the masterpieces of literature (1171)
- The programme asks only acknowledgement for the possibility of precise definition of the psychological moment which prompts the composer to create his work and of the thought to which he gives outward form (1168)
- The specifically musical symphonist carries his listeners with him into ideal regions, whose shaping and ornamenting he relinquishes to their individual imaginations; in such cases it is extremely dangerous to wish to impose on one’s neighbour the same scenes or successions of ideas into which our imagination feels transported. The painter-symphonist, however, setting himself the task of reproducing with equal clarity a picture clearly present in his mind, of developing a series of emotional states which are unequivocally and definitely latent in his consciousness – why may he not, through a programme, strive to make himself fully intelligible? (1069)
- Liszt’s slogan: ‘new forms for new ideas, new skins for new wine’

Franz Liszt and Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein, ‘Berlioz and his Harold Symphony’ (1855), partly translated in Treitler 1998: 1158-1174

LISZT'S MAJOR SYMPHONIC WORKS

Symphonic poems

- *Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne / Bergsymphonie* (1847-1856)
- *Tasso: Lamento e trionfo* (1847-1854)
- *Les Préludes* (1849-1855)
- *Héroïde funèbre* (1849-1856)
- *Prometheus* (1850-1855)
- *Mazeppa* (1850-1855)
- *Orpheus* (1853-1854)
- *Festklänge* (1853-1861)
- *Hungaria* (1854)
- *Die Ideale* (1856-1857)
- *Hunnenschlacht* (1857)
- *Hamlet* (1858)

Symphonies

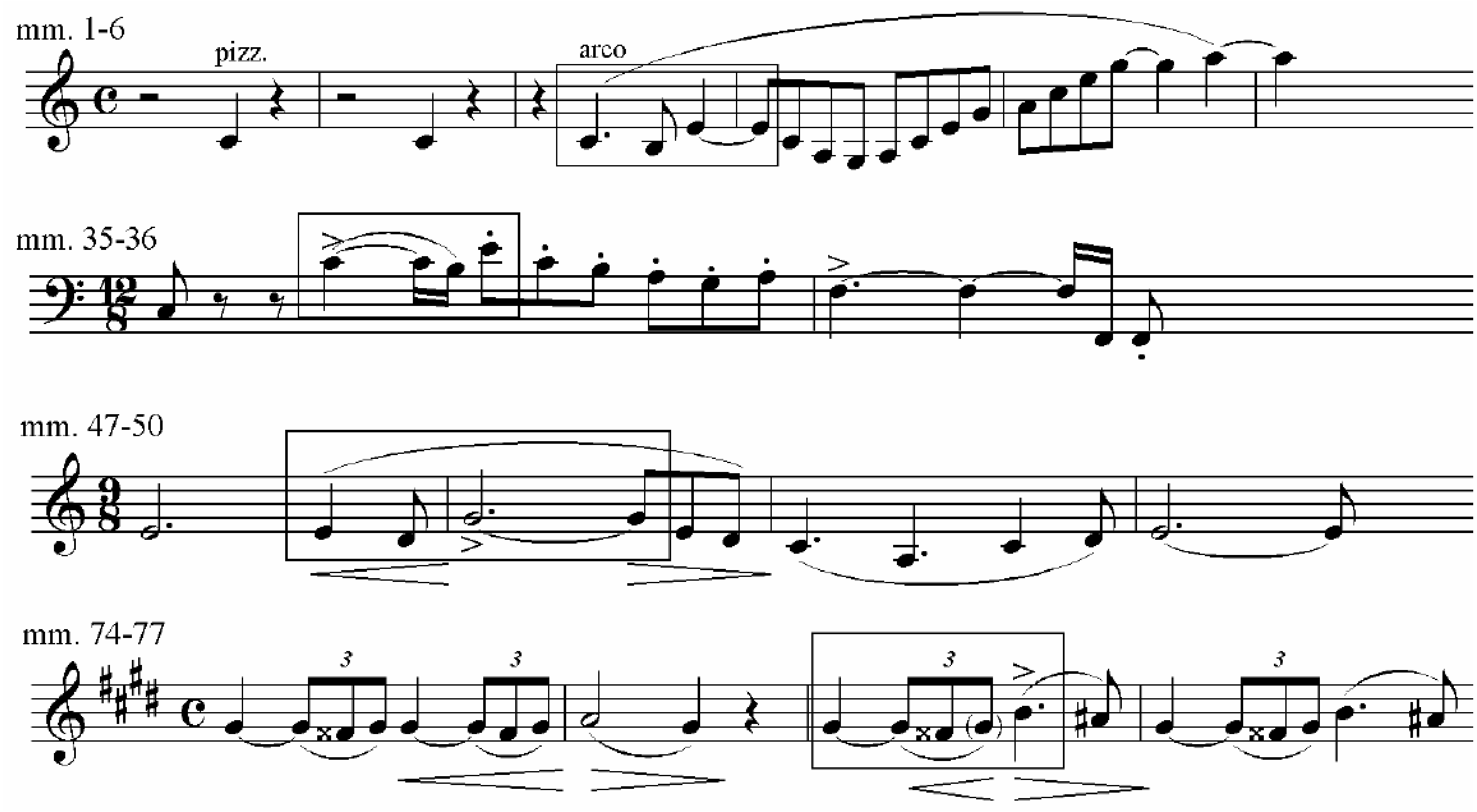
- *Eine Faust-Symphonie in drei Charakterbildern* (1854-1861)
- *Eine Symphonie zu Dantes Divina Commedia* (1855-1856)

*LES PRÉLUDES, D'APRÈS LAMARTINE**

What is our life but a series of preludes to that unknown Hymn, the first and solemn note of which is intoned by Death? – Love is the glowing dawn of all existence; but what is the fate where the first delights of happiness are not interrupted by some storm, the mortal blast of which dissipates its fine illusions; the fatal lightning of which consumes its altar; and where in the cruelly wounded soul which, on issuing from one of these tempests, does not endeavour to rest his recollection in the calm serenity of life in the fields? Nevertheless man hardly gives himself up for long to the enjoyment of the beneficent stillness which at first he has shared in Nature's bosom, and when 'the trumpet sounds the alarm', he hastens to the dangerous post, whatever the war may be, which calls him to its ranks, in order to recover at last in the combat full consciousness of himself and entire possession of his energy.

* *Méditations poétiques*

LES PRÉLUDES: COMMON MOTIVIC KERNEL



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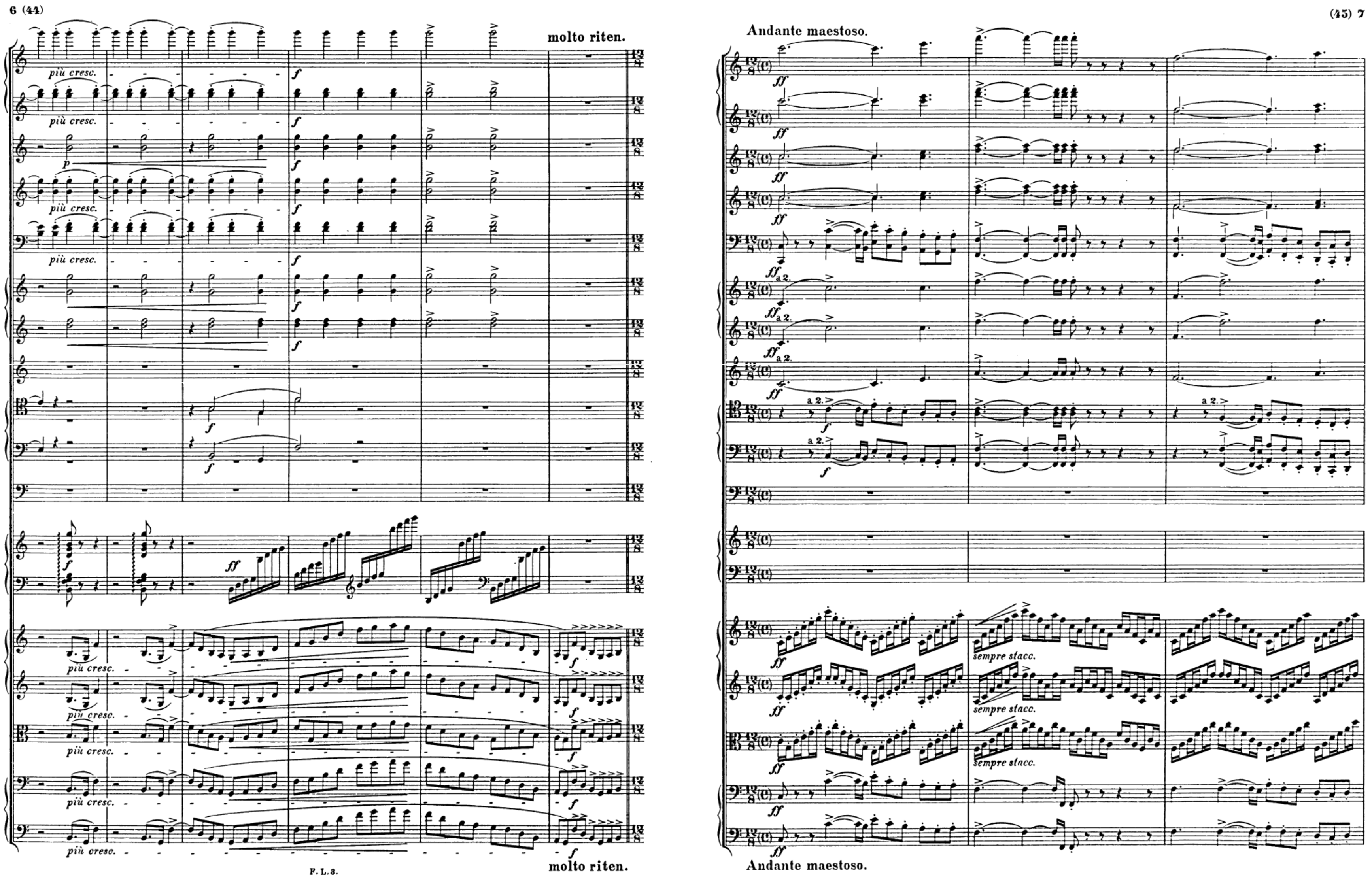

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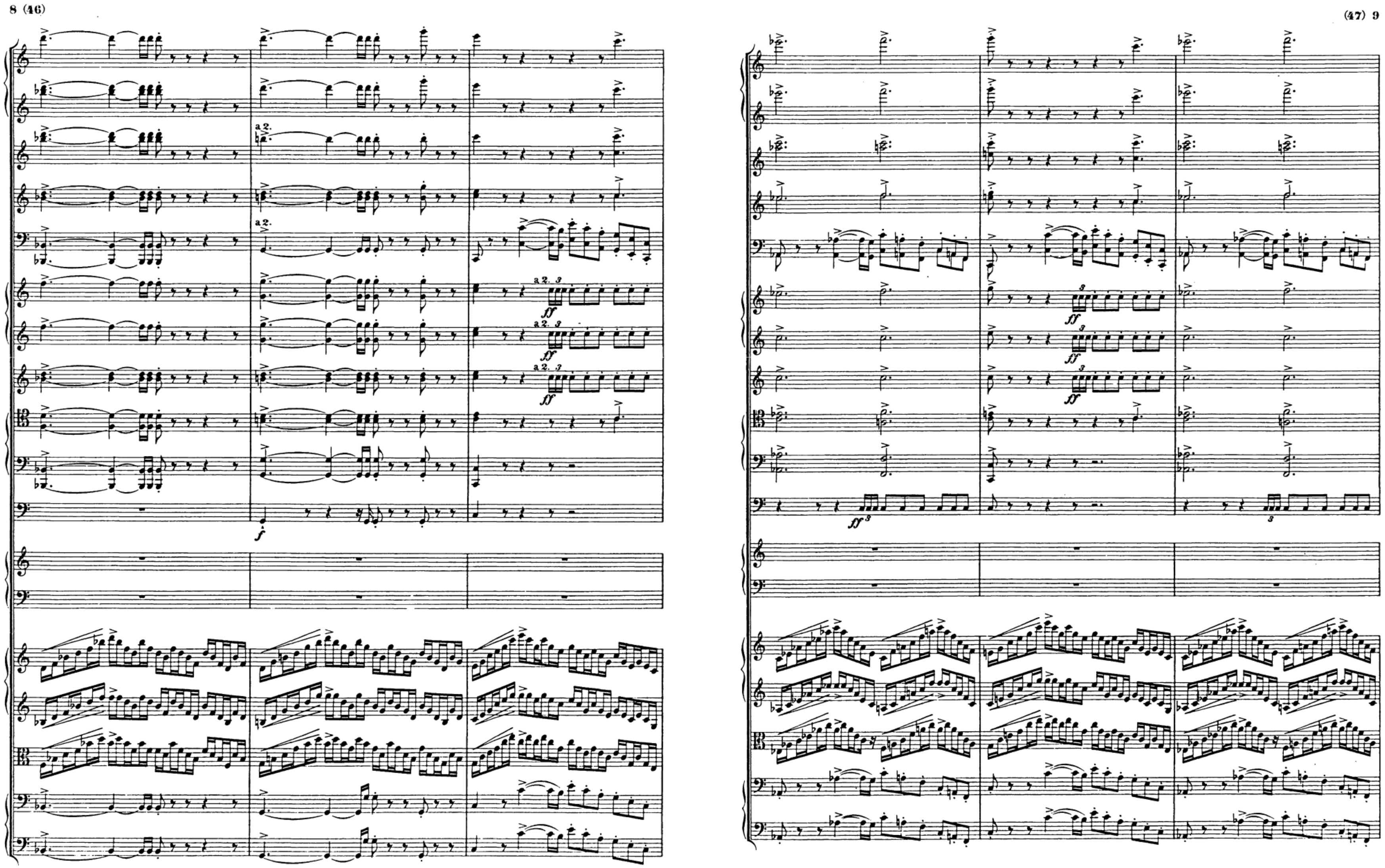

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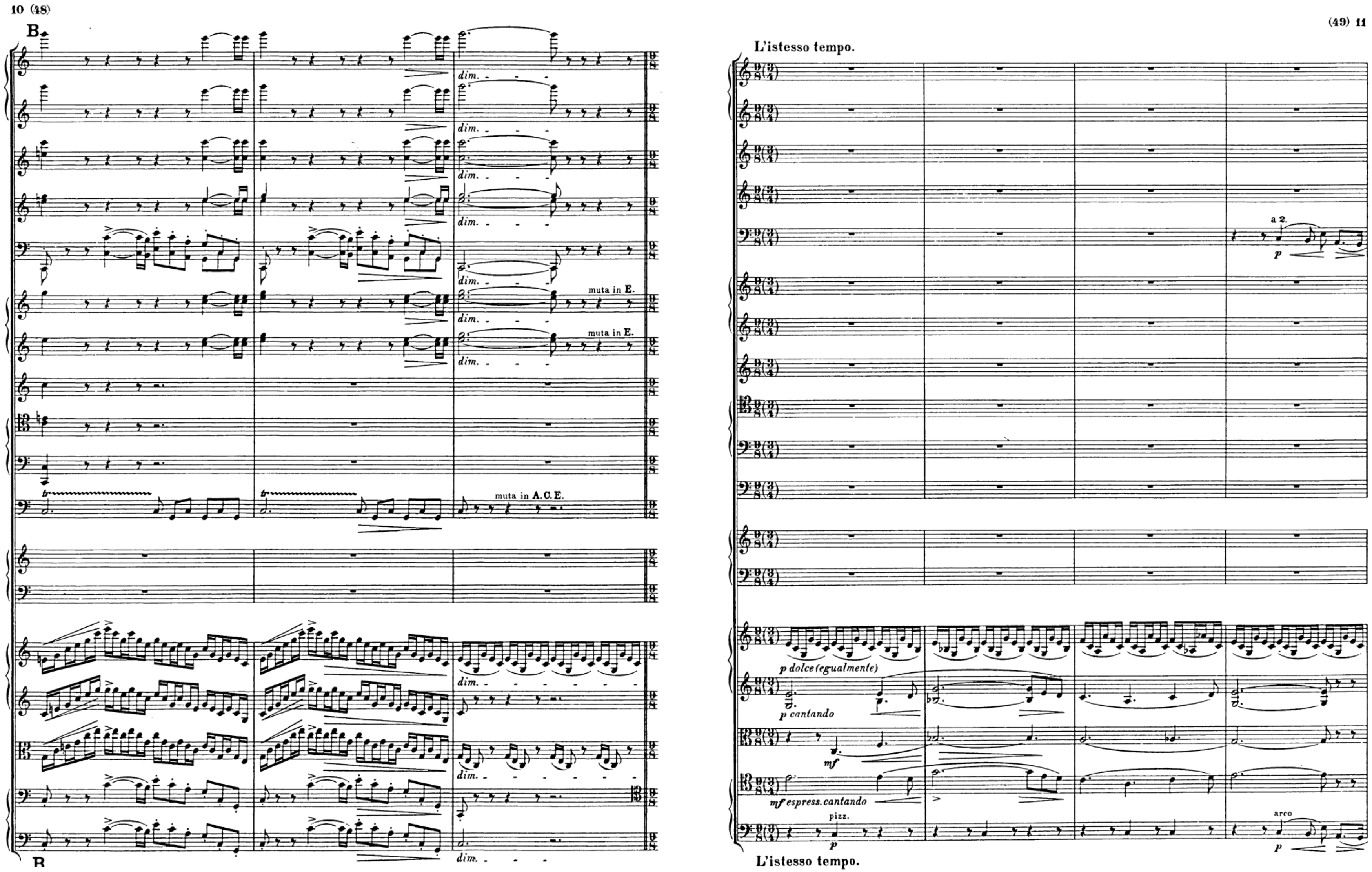
LES PRÉLUDES: EXPOSITION



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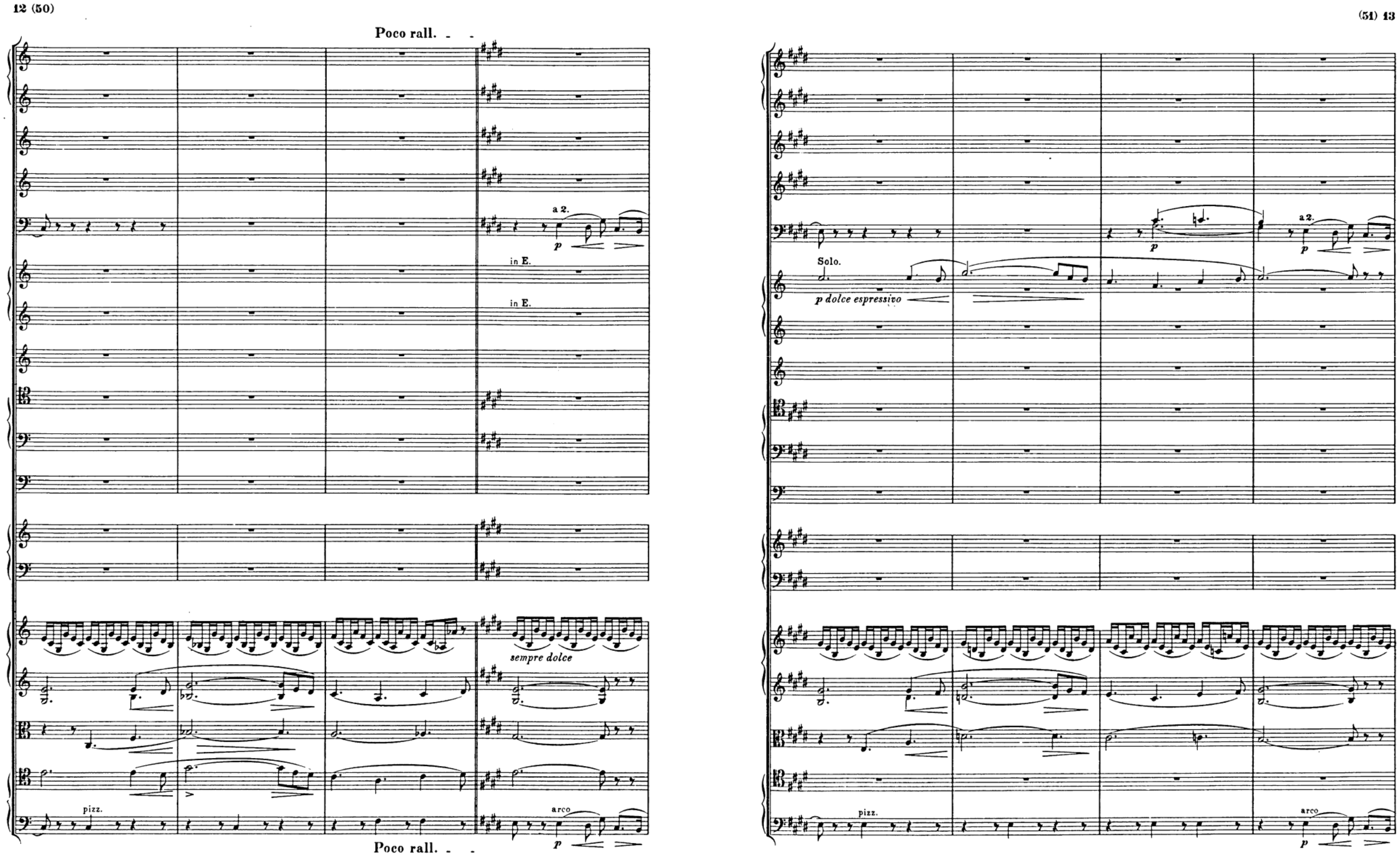

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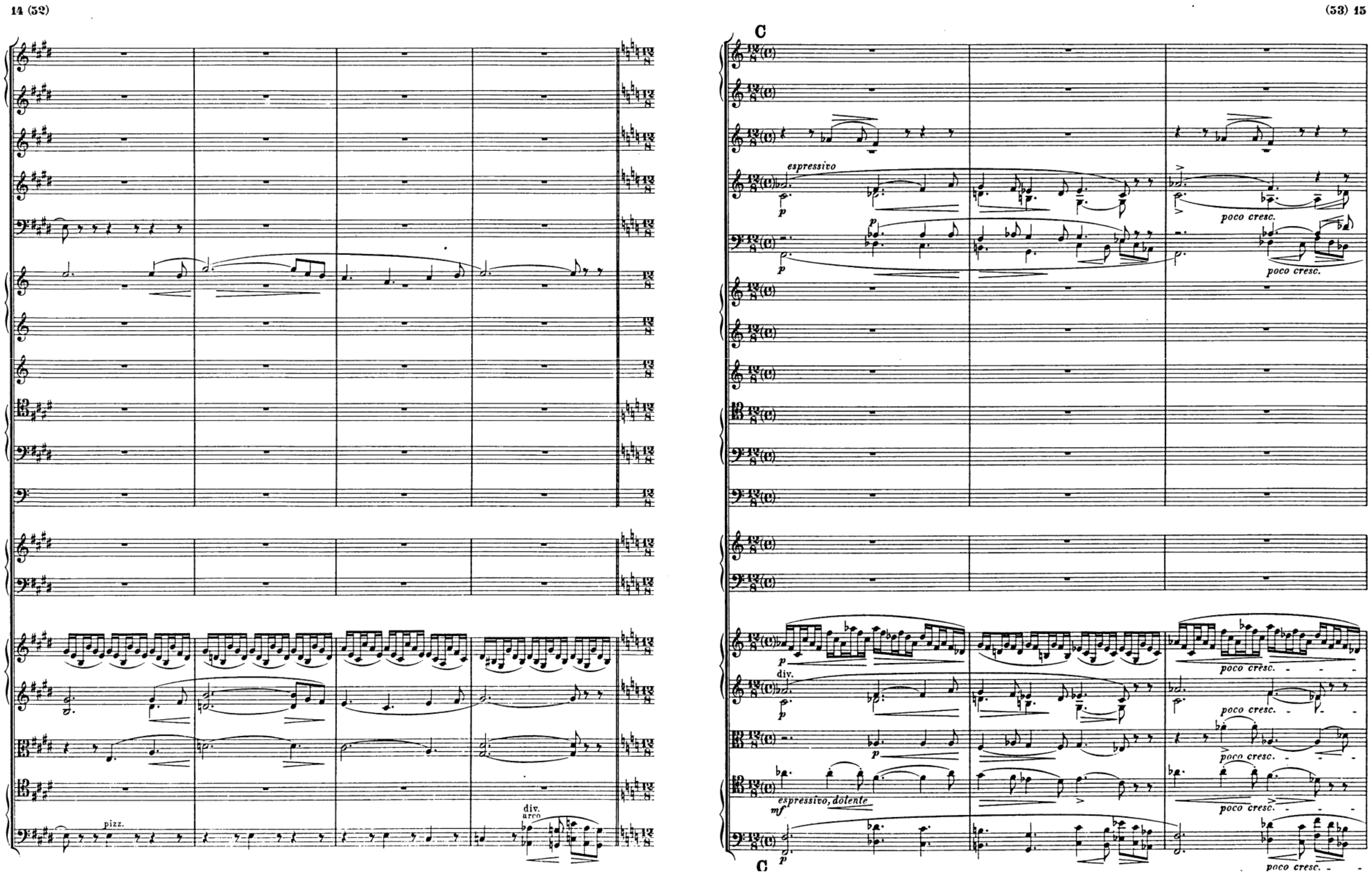

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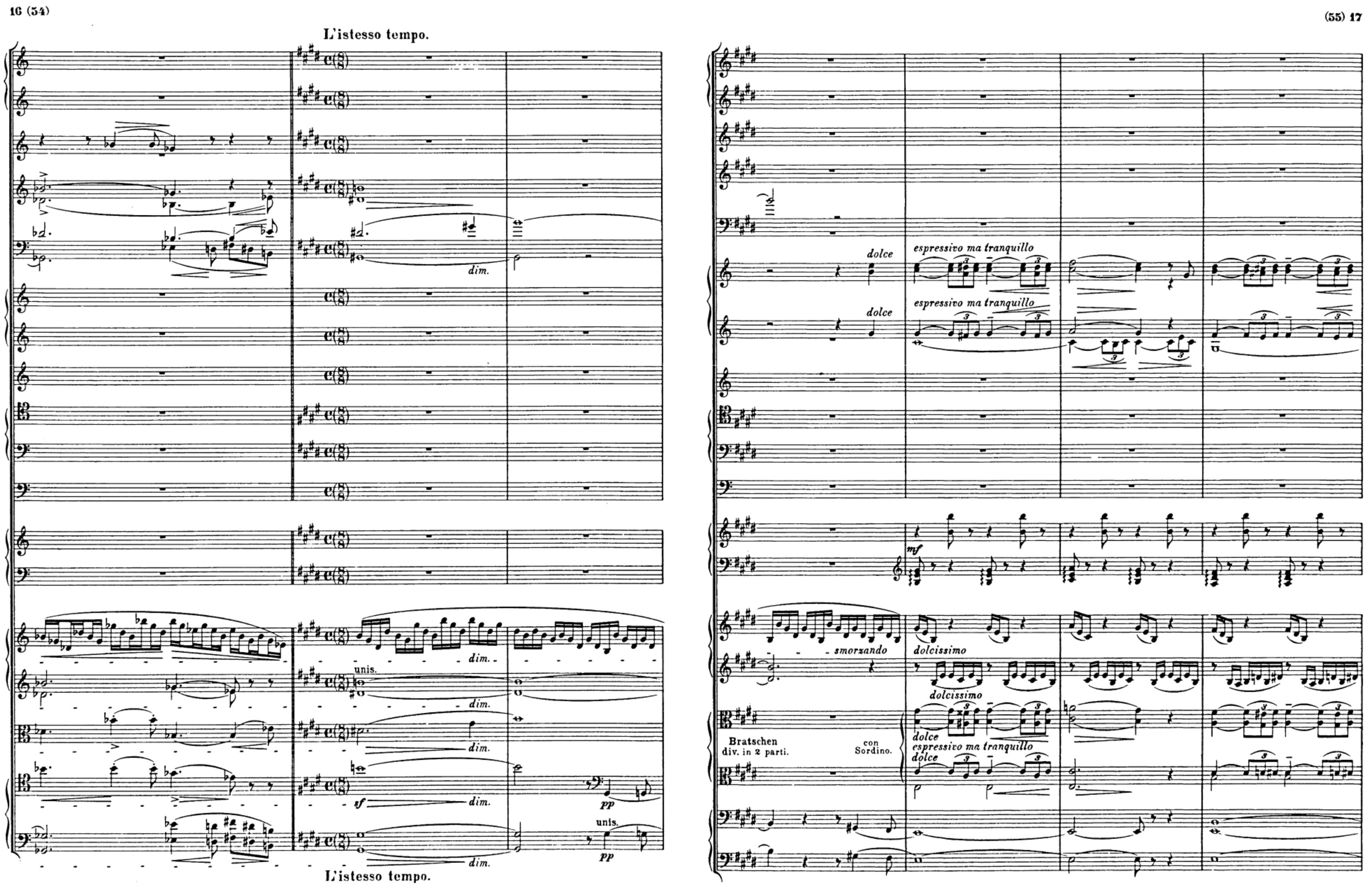

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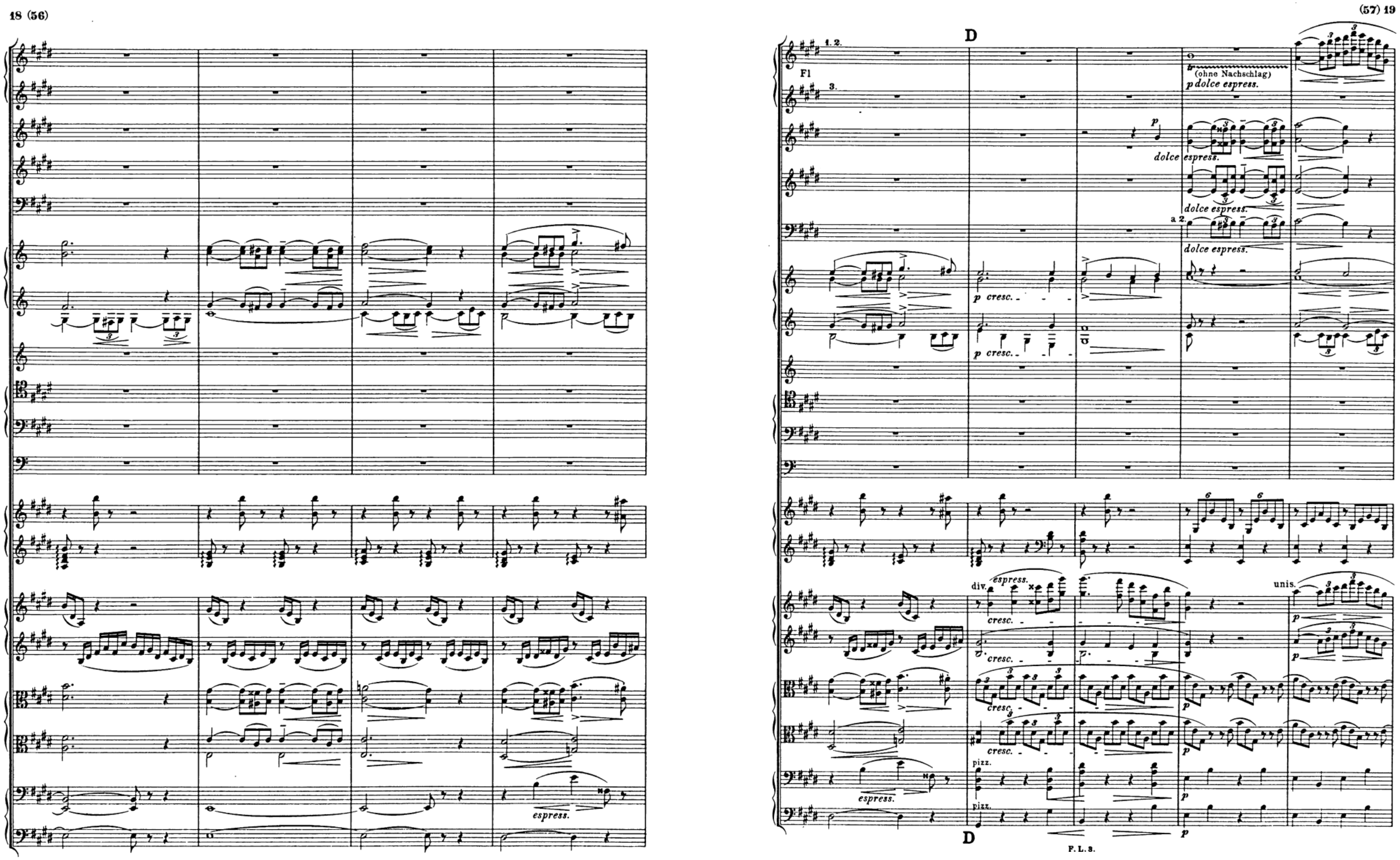

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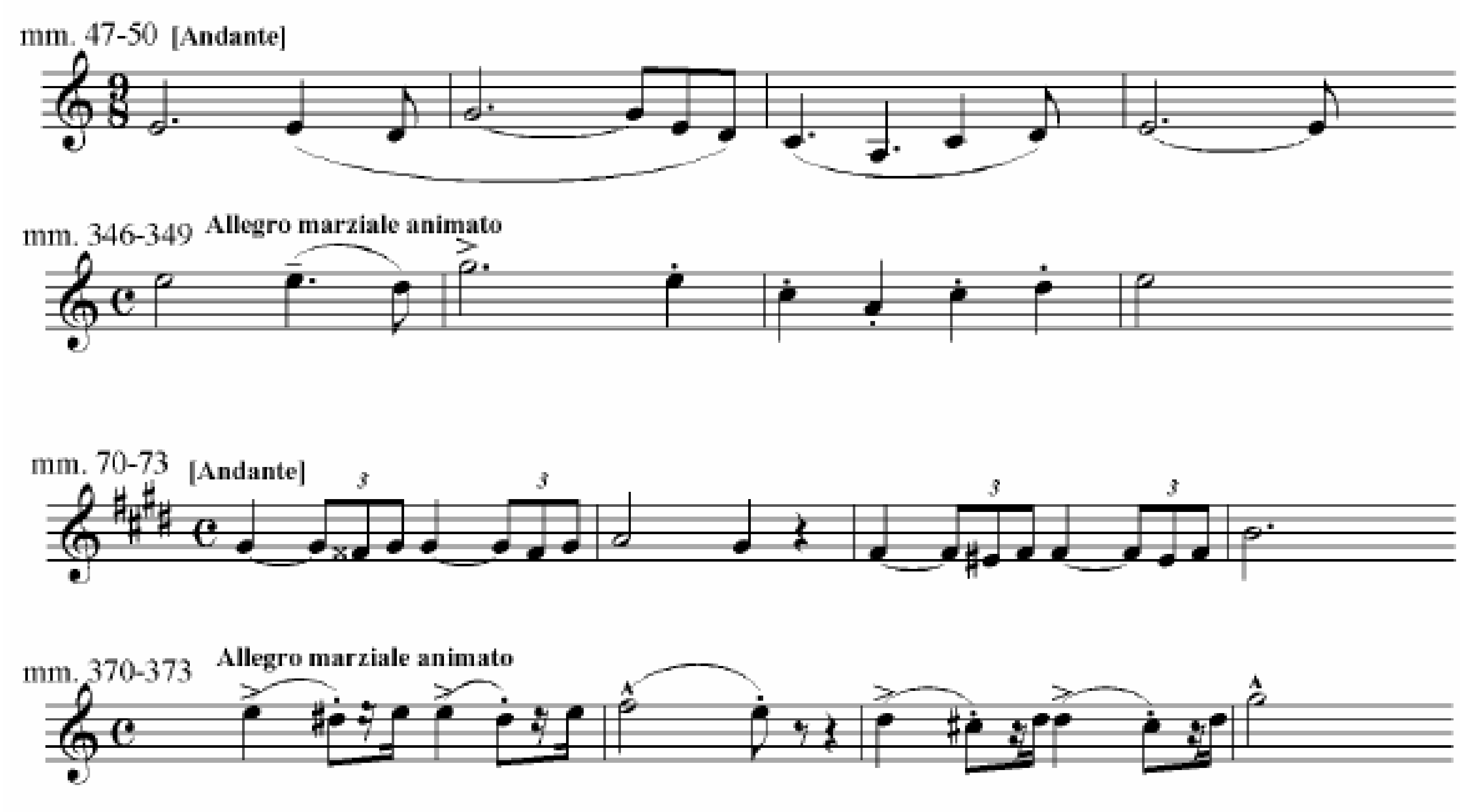
LES PRÉLUDES: THEMATIC TRANSFORMATION



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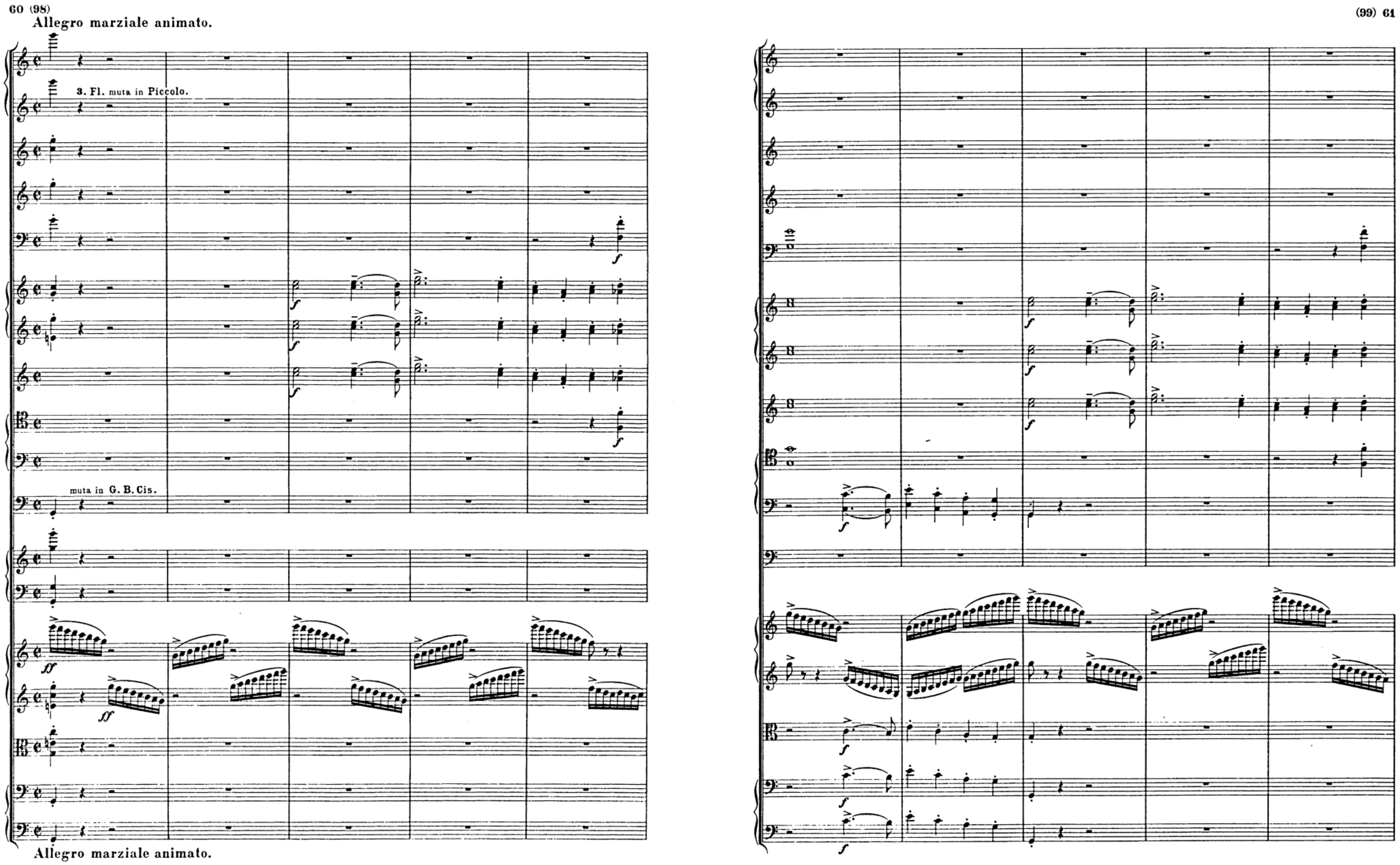

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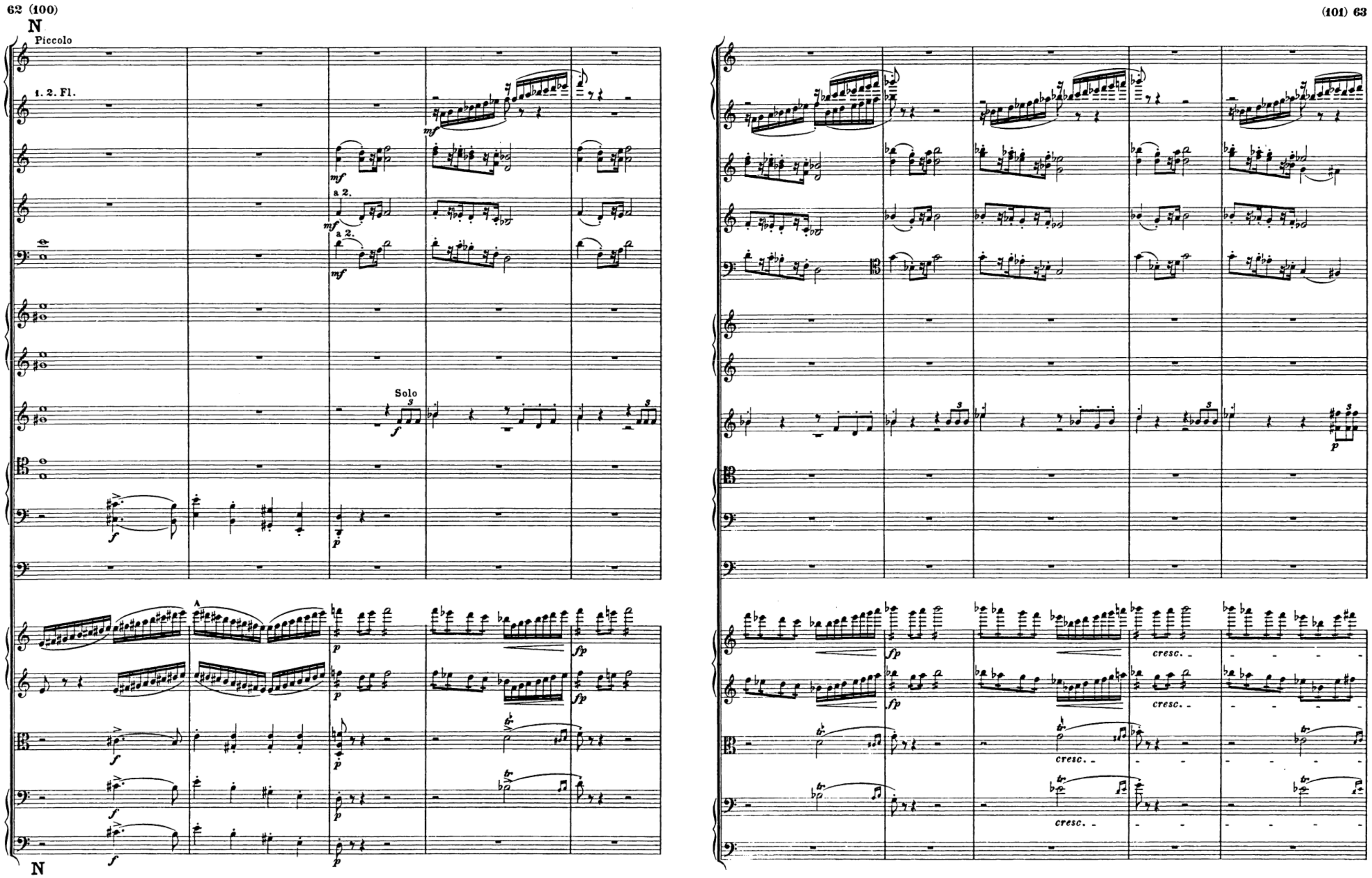

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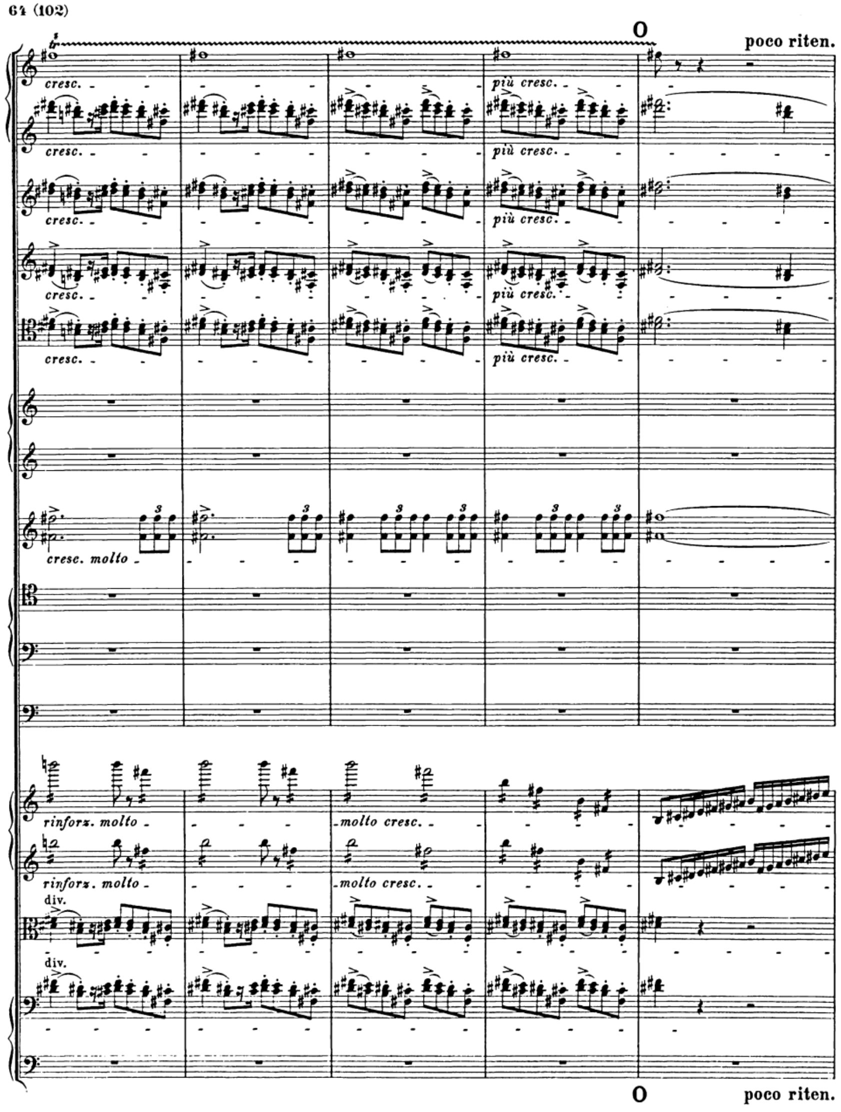

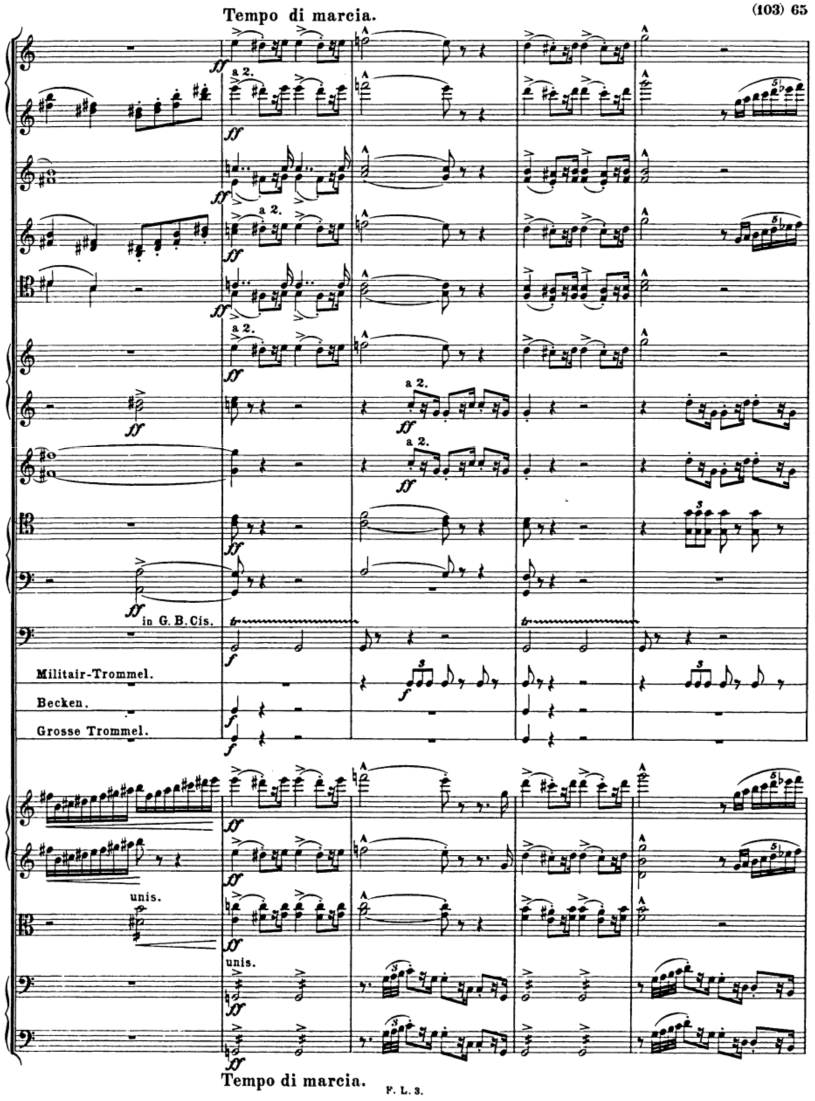

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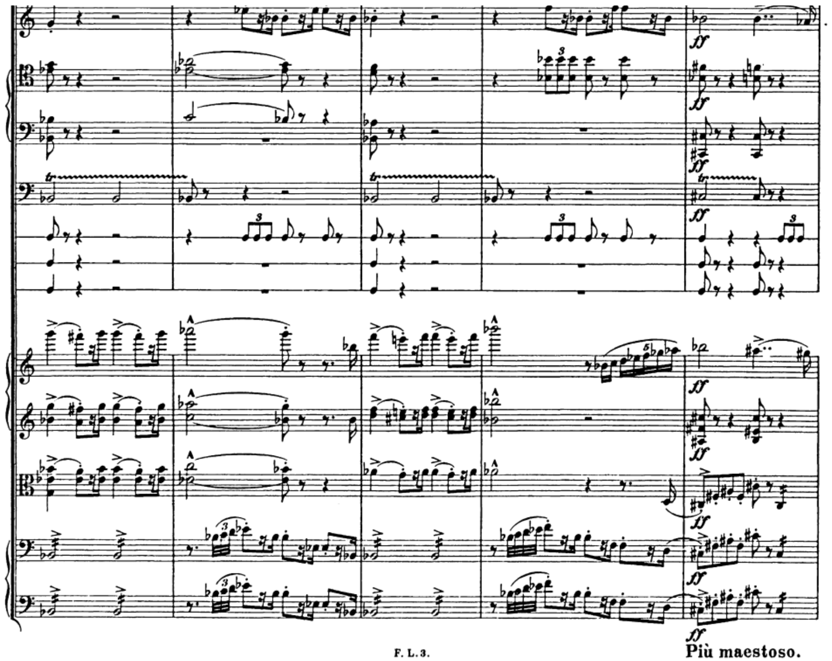

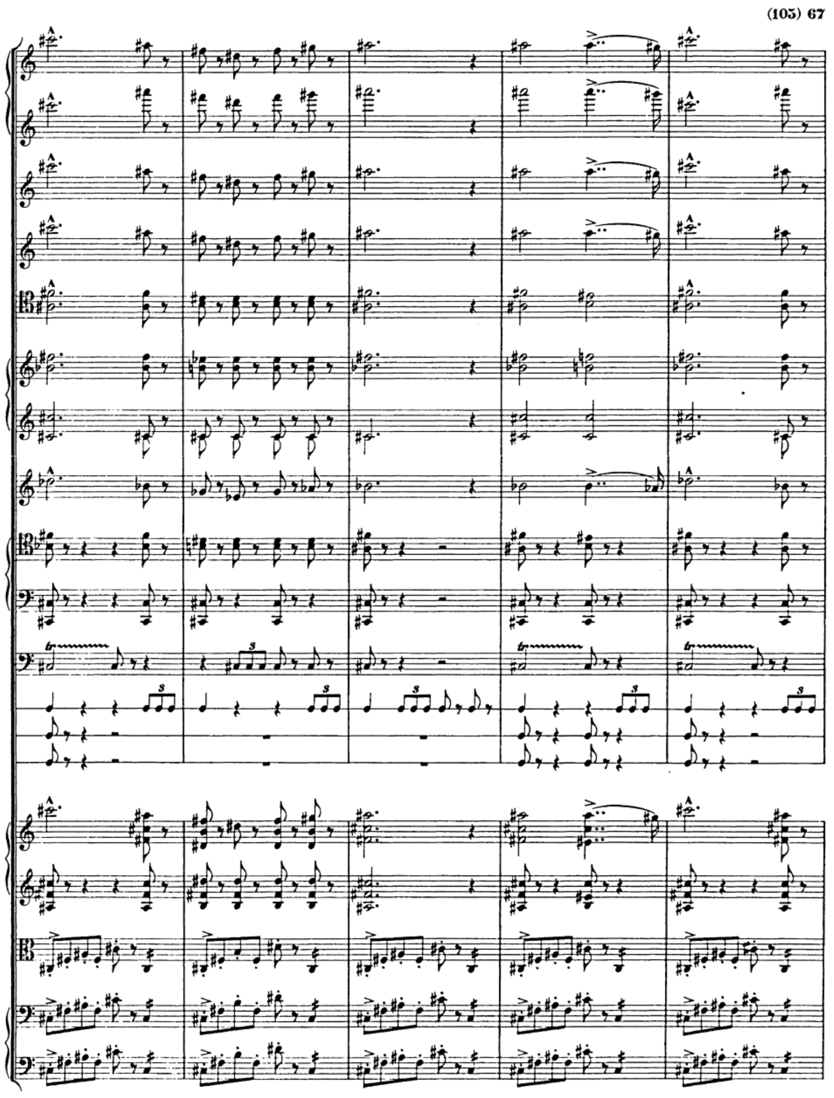

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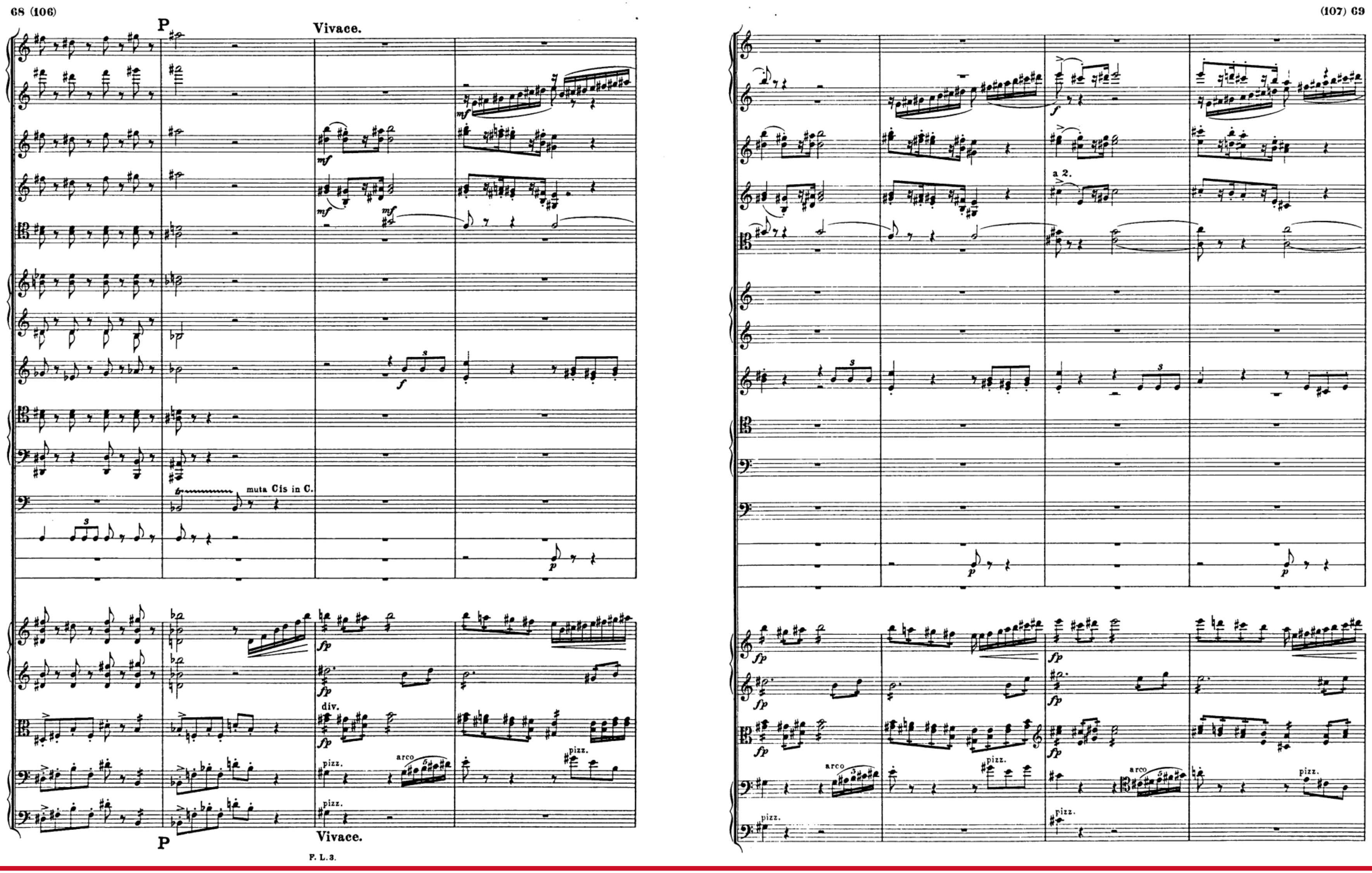

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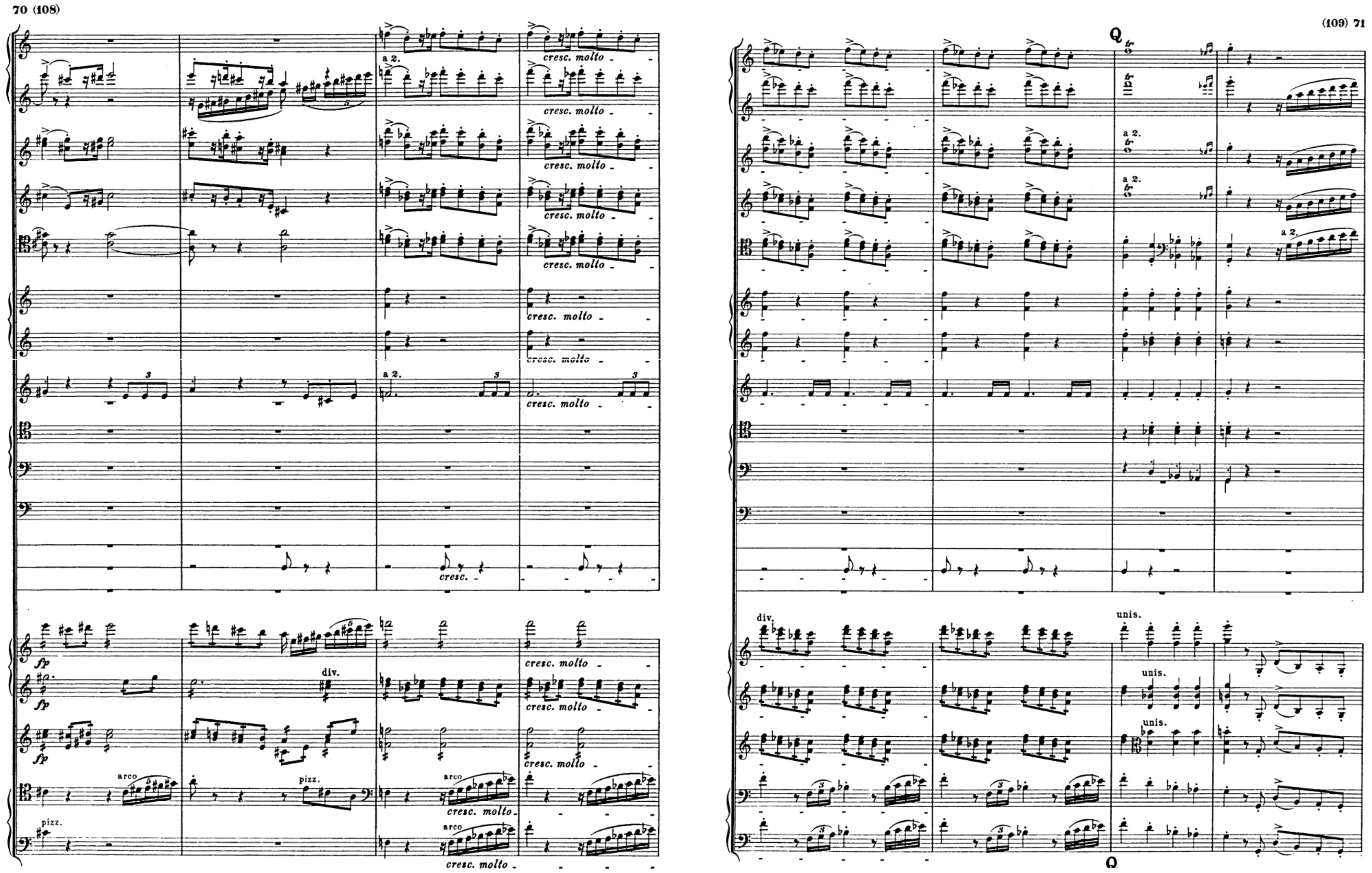

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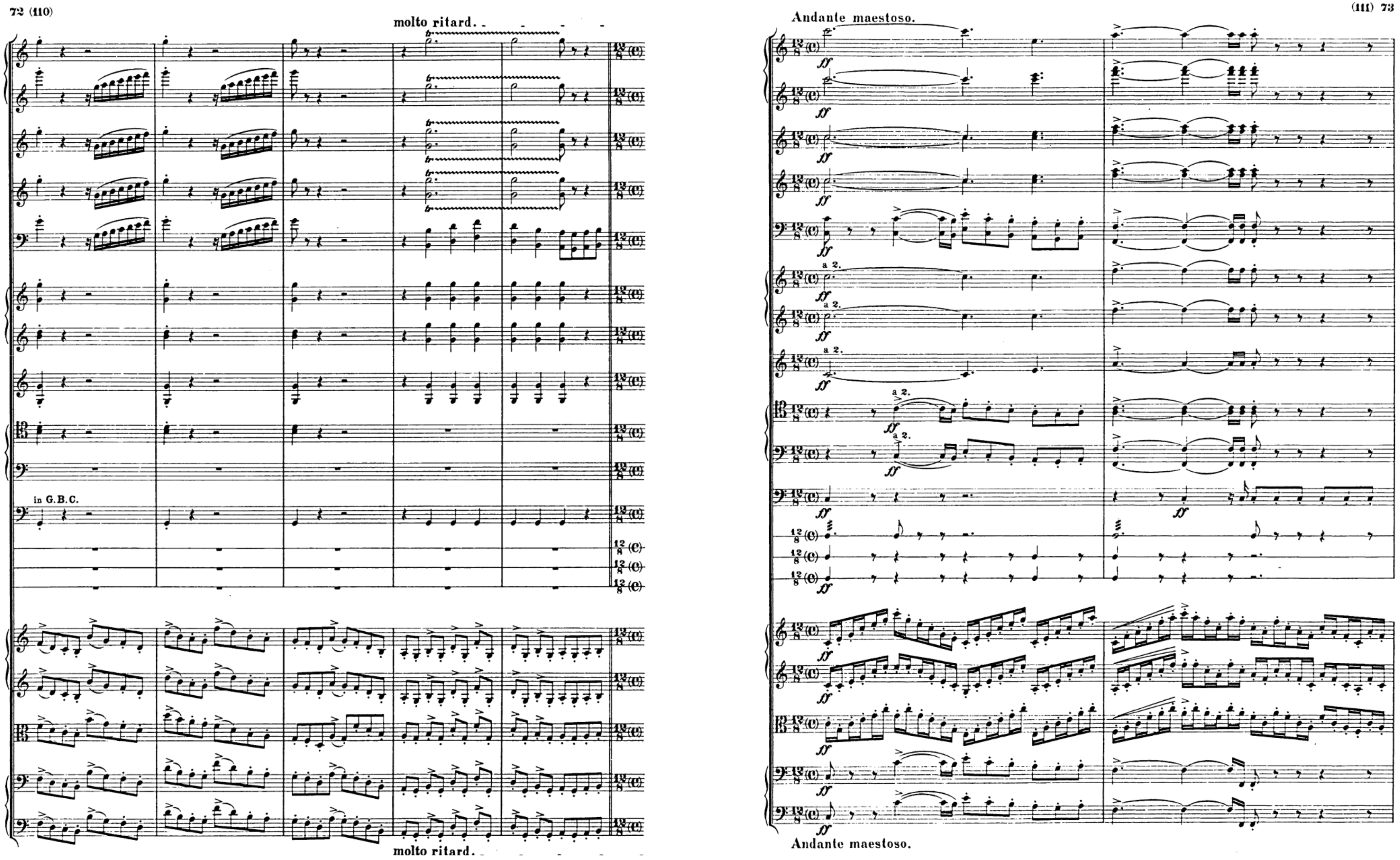

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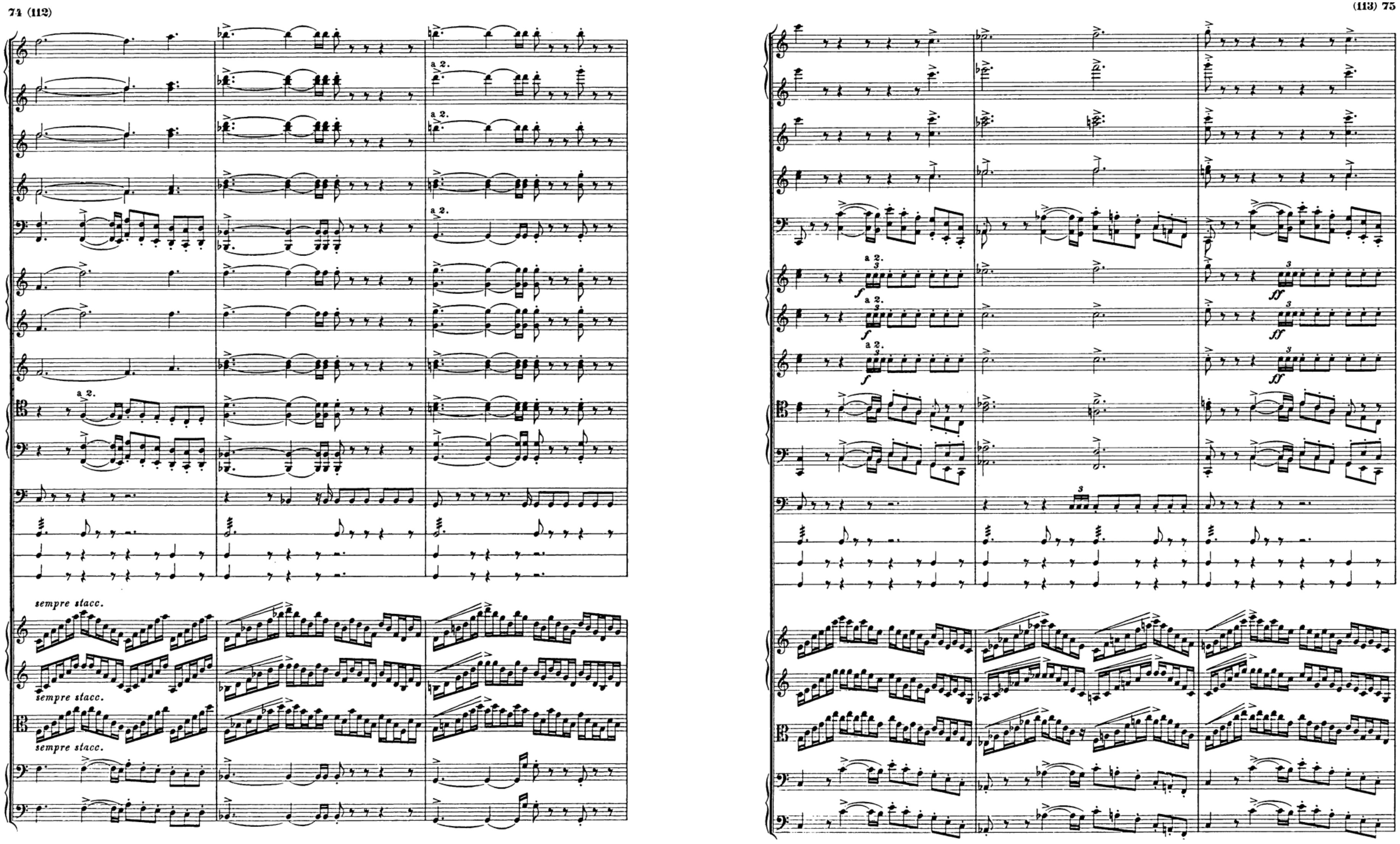

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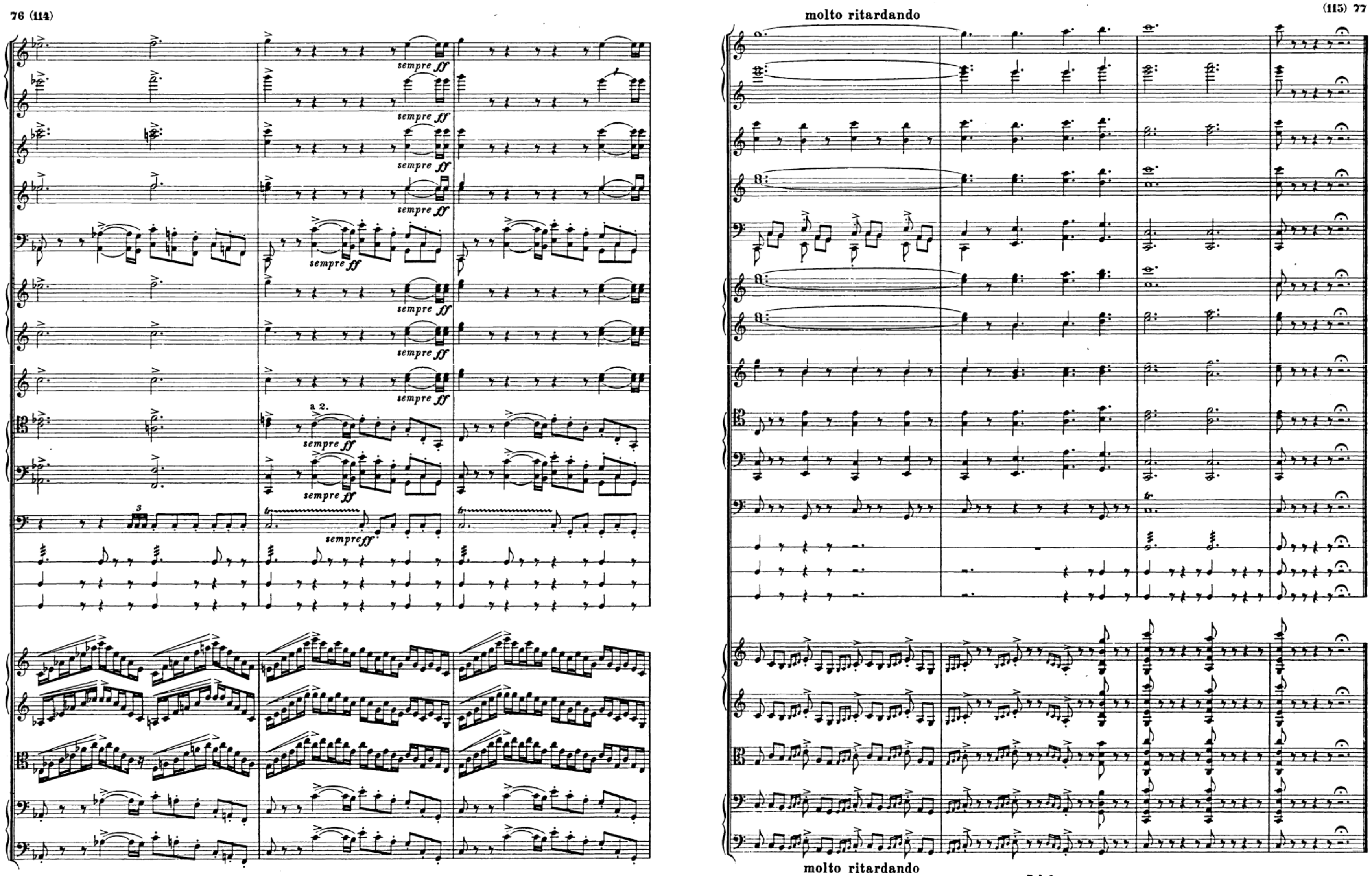

LES PRÉLUDES: FORMAL LAYOUT

Bar	Section	Formal description	
1	$^{4}_{4}$ Andante	Introduction	
35	$^{12}_{8}$ Andante maestoso	Exposition: P (C major)	
47	$^{9}_{8}$ L'istesso tempo		TR
70	$^{4}_{4}$		S (E major); links into next section
109 131 182	Allegro ma non troppo $^{12}_{8}$ Allegro tempestoso $^{4}_{4}$ Un poco più moderato	Development	
200	$^{6}_{8}$ Allegretto pastorale		[Episode]
260 296	 [Accelerando]	Recapitulation: S (A major) + Pastoral idea (C major)	
344	$^{2}_{2}$ Allegro marziale animato		TR fanfares
370	Tempo di marcia		S (C major)
378			TR
405	$^{12}_{8}$ Andante maestoso	Coda [?]: P (C major)	

LES PRÉLUDES: CYCLE VS SONATA

mm.	Form	Cycle
1-34	Introduction	[First movement]
	Exposition	
35-46	Main theme	
47-69	Bridge	
70-104	Subsidiary theme group	
105-108	Transition	
	Development	
109-159	Elaboration of basic motive	
160-181	New theme	
182-199	Elaboration of bridge theme	
200-295	------------	Interior movement
	Recapitulation	
296-343	Subsidiary theme	
344-404	Bridge	Finale
405-419	Coda/Main theme	------------

Figure 17: Form and cycle in Liszt's *Les Préludes*

Steven Vande Moortele, *Two-Dimensional Sonata Form in Germany and Austria between 1850 and 1950: Theoretical, Analytical, and Critical Perspectives* (Ph.D Dissertation: Catholic University Leuven, 2006): 108

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WAGNER’S MAJOR WORKS FOR THE STAGE

Early works
- *Die Feen* (1833-1834)
- *Das Liebesverbot* (1834-1835)
- *Rienzi* (1837-1840)

Romantic operas
- *Der fliegende Holländer* (1840-1841)
- *Tannhäuser* (1842-1845; rev. 1860-1861)
- *Lohengrin* (1845-1848)

Music dramas
- *Der Ring des Nibelungen*
  - *Das Rheingold* (1851-1854)
  - *Die Walküre* (1851-1856)
  - *Siegfried* (1851-1871)
  - *Götterdämmerung* (1848-1874)
- *Tristan und Isolde* (1854-1859)
- *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1845-1867)
- *Parsifal* (1857-1881)

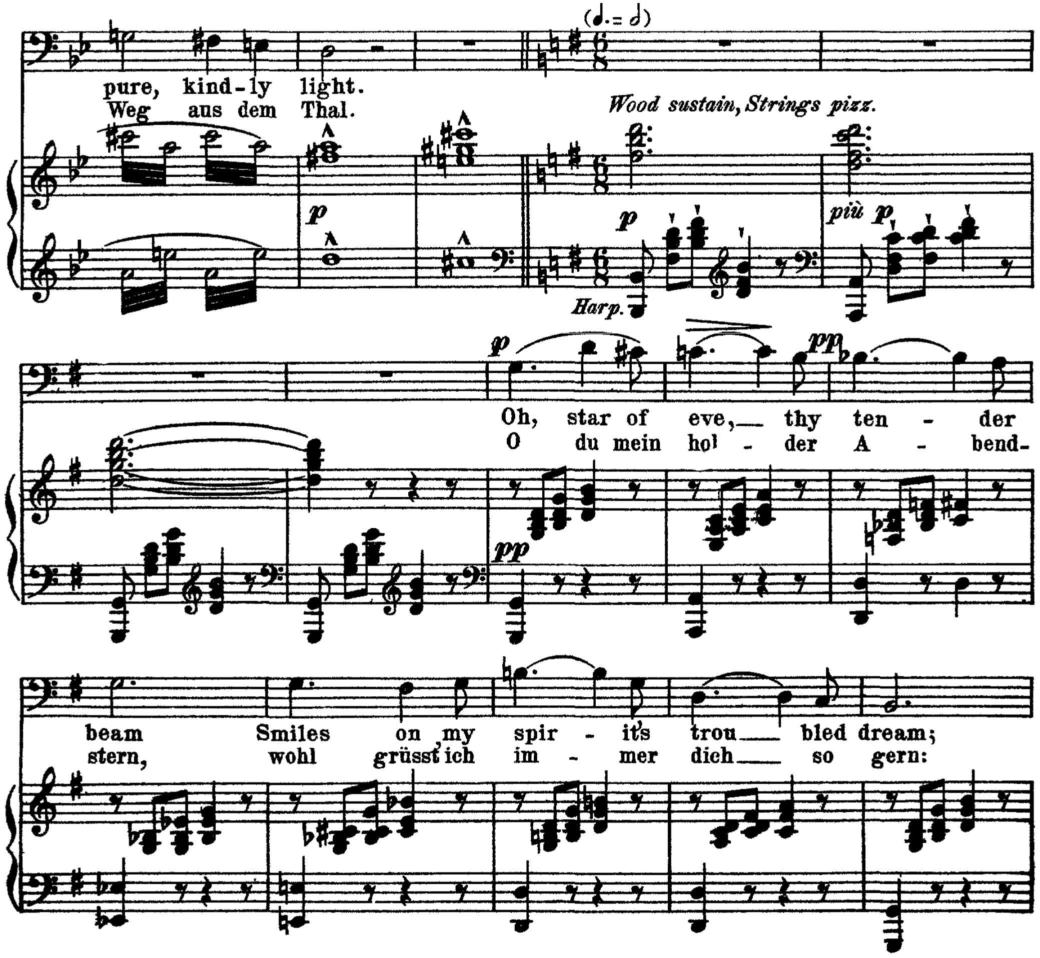
ROMANTIC OPERA: *TANNHÄUSER*

Henri Fantin-Latour, Tannhäuser--Venusberg, 1876

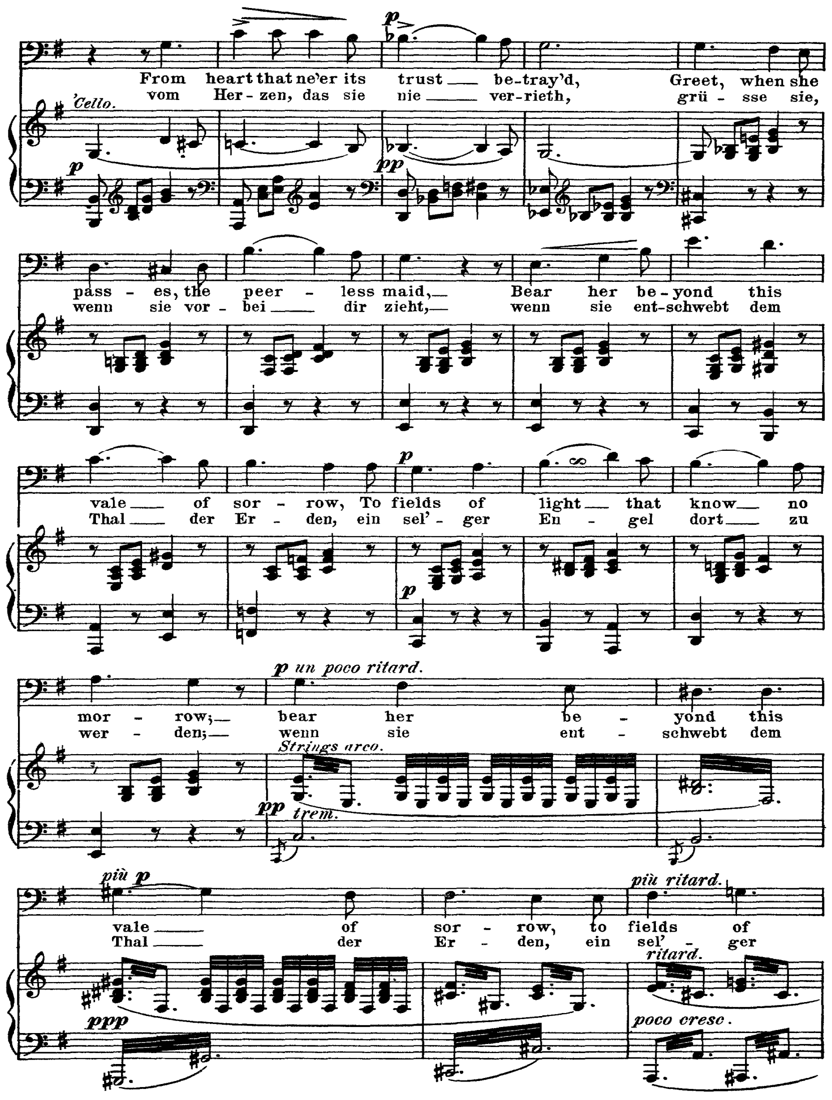
Plot outline: The story tells of a minstrel-knight, Tannhäuser, who is loved by Elisabeth, the niece of his feudal lord, but finds his way into the supernatural realm of the Venusberg (mountain of Venus), a sinful, sensual paradise. After his return, he reveals this during a song contest, and is only saved from summary execution by the intervention of Elisabeth. He goes to Rome to expiate his crimes, but is refused absolution until the Pope’s staff should sprout. Discouraged, he is about to return to the Venusberg (and so be damned eternally), but is saved by the prayers of Elisabeth, who has died praying for him. He too expires, but we learn that the Pope’s staff has indeed sprouted, indicating his redemption.

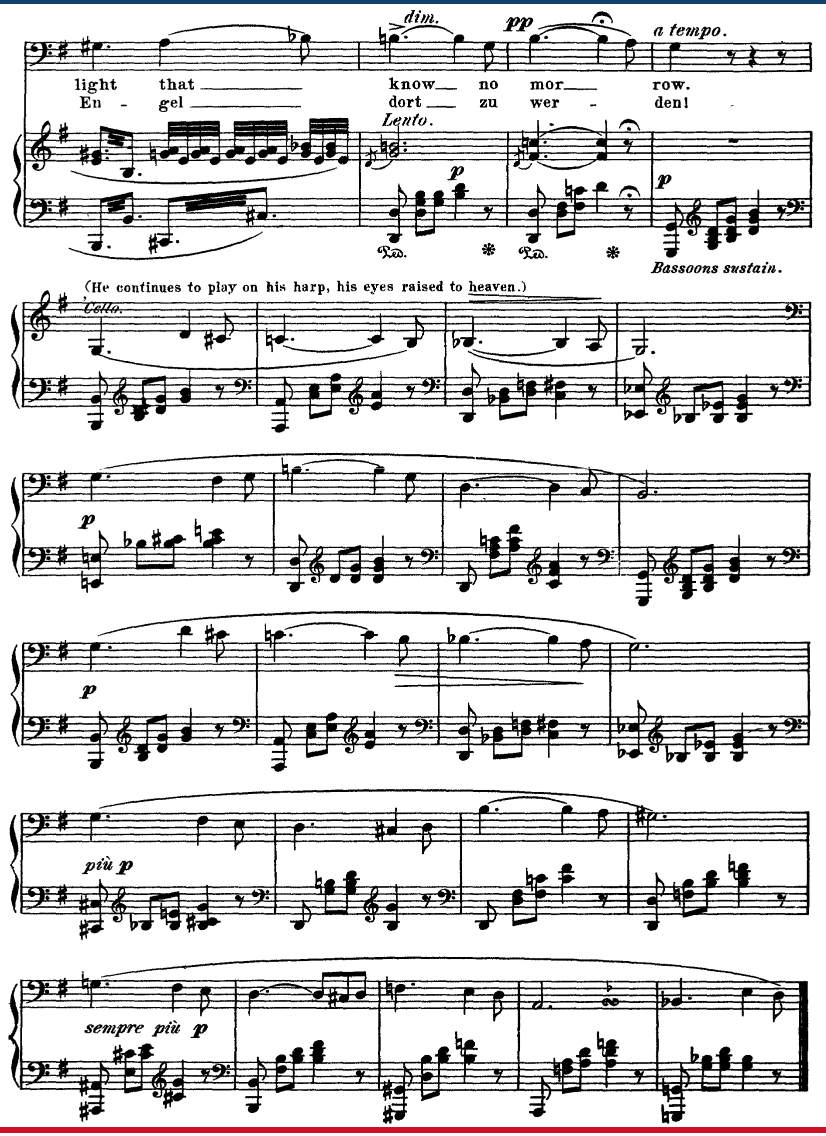
‘O DU MEIN HOLDER ABENDSTERN’ [1/2]

Wolfram’s song

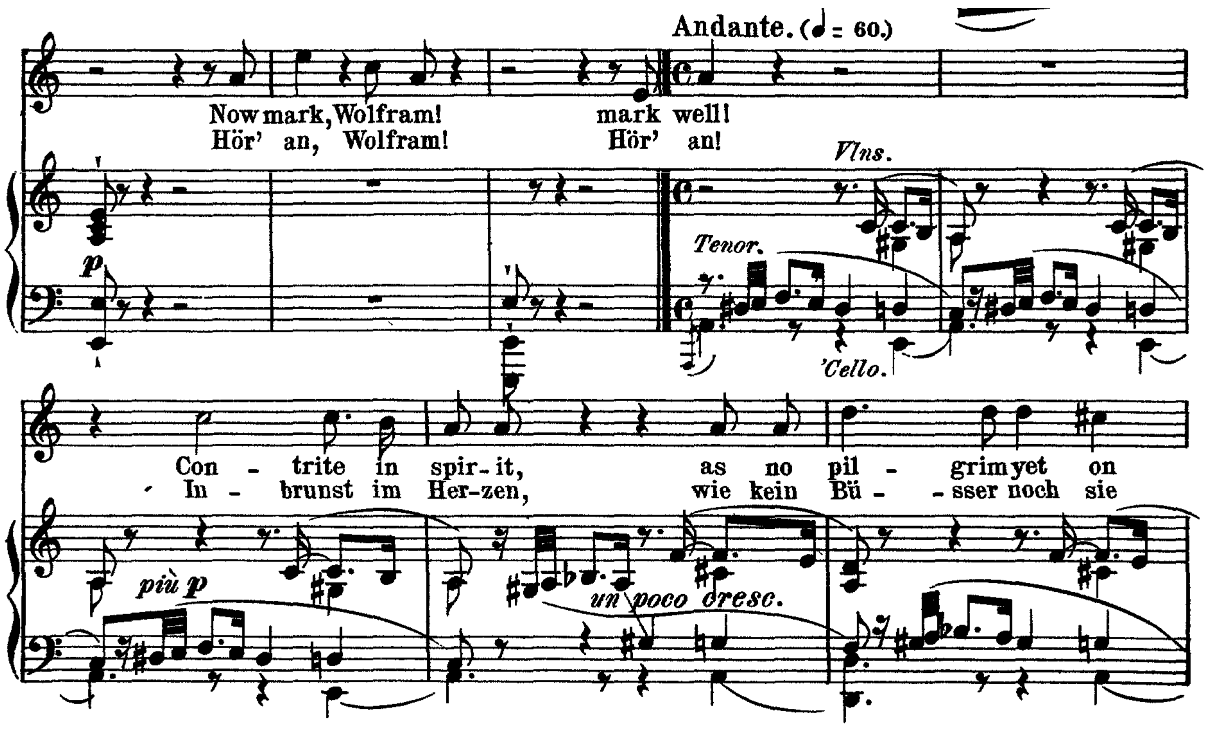


O DU MEIN HOLDER ABENDSTERN [2/2]





TANNHÄUSER’S NARRATION (ACT III)



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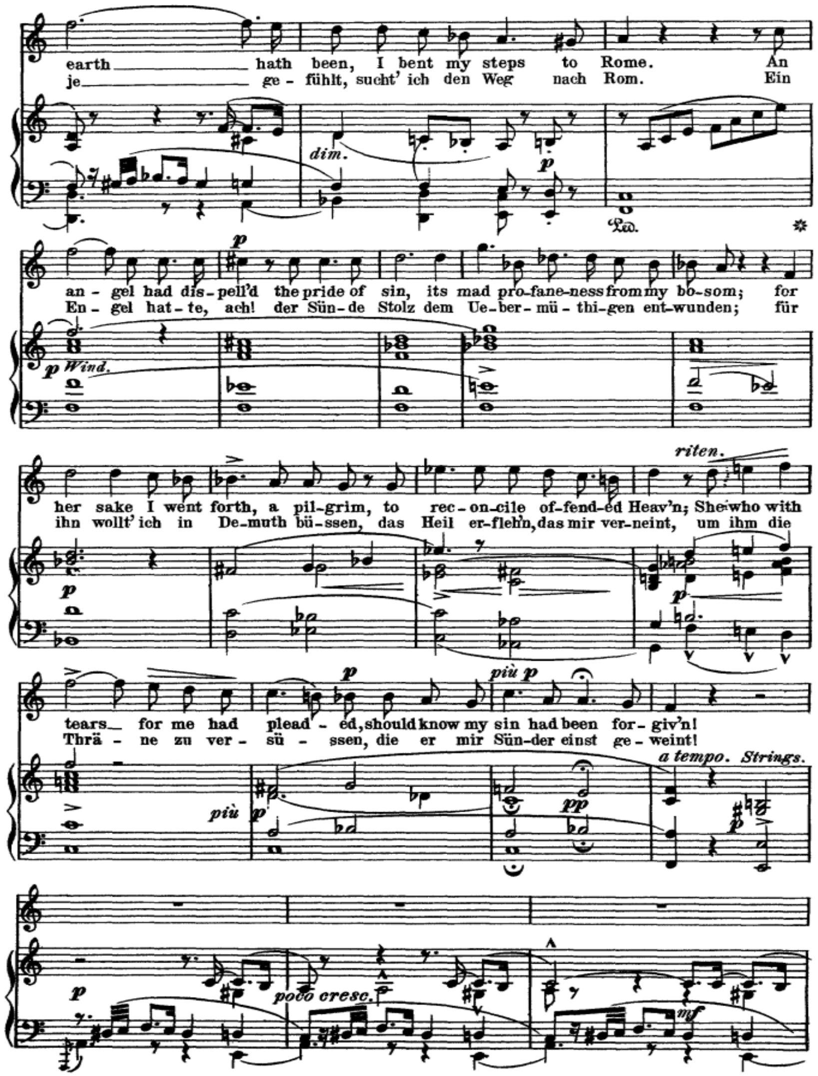
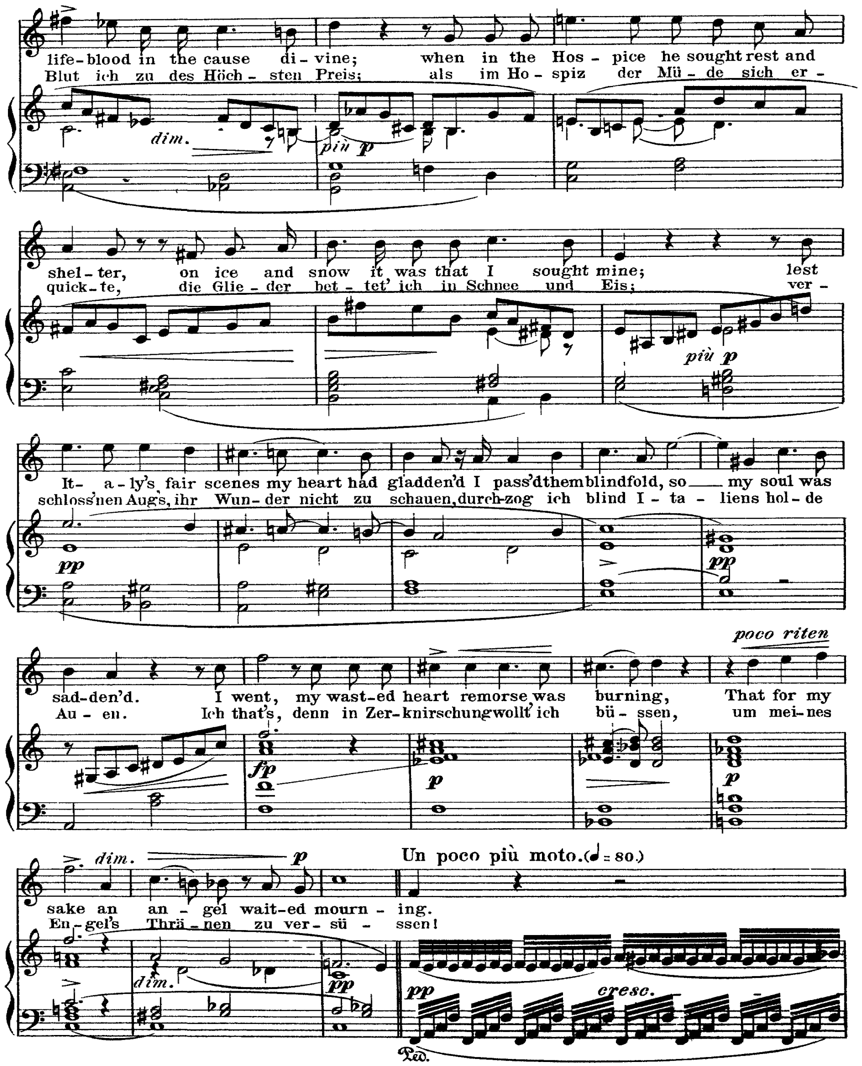
TANNHÄUSER'S NARRATION

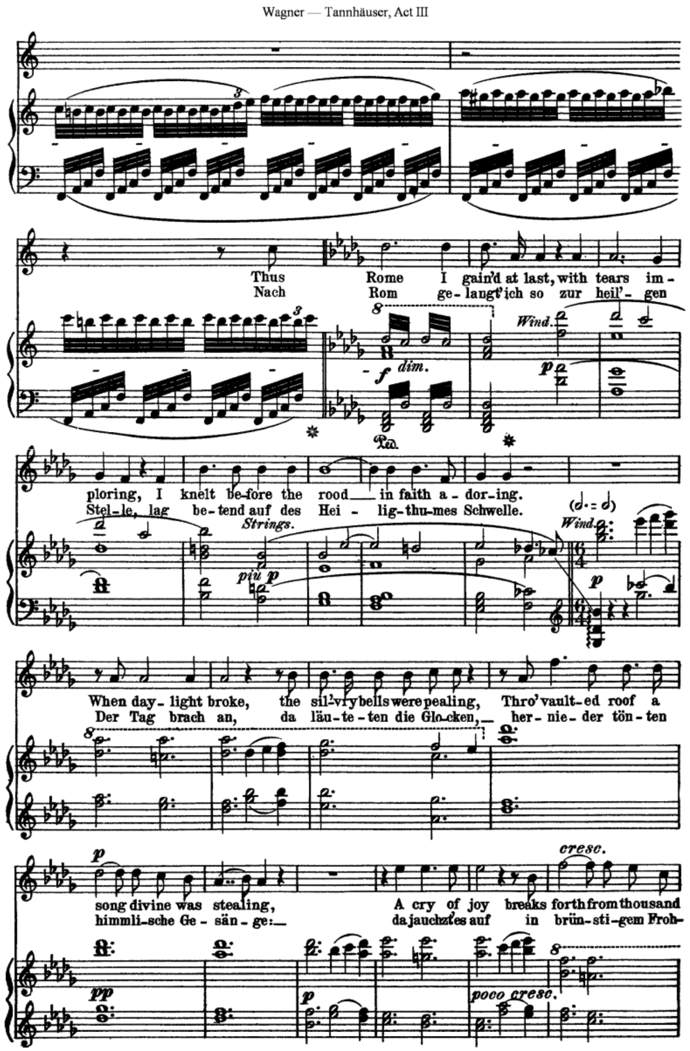
Wagner — Tannhäuser, Act III



Wagner — Tannhäuser, Act III



TANNHÄUSER’S NARRATION



etc.

SOME OF WAGNER’S IMPORTANT WRITINGS

Zurich writings

- Art and Revolution (1849)
- The Artwork of the Future (1849)
- Judaism in Music (1850, rev. 1869)
- Opera and Drama (1850-51)
- A Communication to my Friends (1851)
- On Franz Liszt’s Symphonic Poems (1857)

Music of the Future (1860)

On Conducting (1869)

Beethoven (1870)

On the Designation ‘Music Drama’ (1872)

A look at the nature of German opera today (1872-3)

Mein Leben (1872 [part], 1911 [cuts], 1963 [entire])

A WAGNERIAN GLOSSARY [1/2]

- *Gesamtkunstwerk* (Total artwork): Wagner’s own term for what would result from the union of the arts of poetry, music and dance (as well as visual arts)
- *Musikdrama* (Music drama): The usual generic description of Wagner’s works after *Lohengrin*, but not one he used. In an 1872 essay ‘On the term “Music drama”’, he suggested instead ‘deeds of music made visible’
- *Bühnenfestspiel* (Stage festival play): Official designation given to *Der Ring des Nibelungen*
- *Bühnenweihfestspiel* (Stage festival consecration play): Designation Wagner gave to *Parsifal*, the only work written expressly for Bayreuth
- *Stabreim* (Stem rhyme): An ancient Germanic verse form, which avoids end rhyme and regular metre in favour of a subtle play of assonance and alliteration

A WAGNERIAN GLOSSARY [2/2]

- *Leitmotiv* (Leading motive): Term often used for the recurring musical motives which form the symphonic web of Wagner’s mature works. Often associated with specific concepts or entities, they fulfil a communicative as well as a musical role
- *Unendliche Melodie* (unending melody): description of Wagner’s mature style, in which obvious hiatuses are avoided, and the music seems to flow in an unbroken arioso
- *Barform*: A form similar to the sentence, consisting of two stanzas (Stollen) and a closing section (Abgesang), i.e. AAB, often found as an organising principle on the small and large scale in Wagner’s works
- *Bogenform* (arch form): A ternary ABA structure, another commonly found structuring principle

WAGNER THE THEORETICIAN [1/4]

Excerpts from his Zurich writings

› It was Beethoven who opened up the boundless faculty of instrumental music for expressing elemental storm and stress. […] Harmonic melody [...] was capable, though merely borne by instruments, of the most limitless expression together with the most unfettered treatment. (156)

› The last symphony of Beethoven is the redemption of Music from out of its own element as a *universal art*. It is the *human* gospel of the art of the future. Beyond it there can be no *progress*, for there can follow on it immediately only the completed artwork of the future, the *universal drama*, to which Beethoven has forged for us the artistic key.

› In instrumental music the innate capabilities of music developed into boundless power, those operatic forms, like burned-out bricks and mortar, stayed chill and naked in their pristine shape, a carcass waiting for the coming guest to pitch his fleeting tent within. (100)

Source: *Wagner on music and drama : a compendium of Richard Wagner's prose works*, ed. Albert Goldman and Evert Sprinchorn, trans. W. Ashton Ellis (New York: Da Capo, 1964)

WAGNER THE THEORETICIAN [2/4]

Excerpts from his Zurich writings

- The problem with contemporary opera, Wagner diagnosed, was that ‘a Means of expression (Music) has been made the end, while the End of expression (the Drama) has been made a means’
- ‘In the drama, we must become *knowers* through the *feeling*. The understanding tells us “*So it is*” only when the feeling has told us, “*So it must be*” (189)
- <u>Stabreim</u>. In the interest of intelligibility, the poet has so to limit the number of his action’s moments, that he may way win the needful space for the motivation of those retained. (192)
- The word poet has concentrated an infinitude of scattered moments of action, sensation, and expression – only cognizable by the understanding – to a point most accessible to the feeling; now comes the tone poet, and has to expand this concentrated, compact point to the utmost fullness of emotional content (207)

WAGNER THE THEORETICIAN [3/4]

Excerpts from his Zurich writings

- The poetic-musical period: *Die Liebe bringt Lust und Leid / Doch in ihr Weh auch webt sie Wonnen'* (211)
- Leitmotif: A musical motive (Motiv) can produce a definite impression on the feeling, inciting it to a function akin to thought, only when the emotion uttered in that motive has been definitely conditioned by a definite object, and proclaimed by a definite individual set before our eyes.' (222).
- Orchestra: The orchestra indisputably possesses a faculty of uttering the unspeakable (217). Allies this with the orchestra's connection to dance and gesture. Orchestra takes on the role of the chorus in Greek tragedy.

WAGNER THE THEORETICIAN [4/4]

Excerpts from his Zurich writings

› [In traditional opera] The disconnected was so particularly the character of operatic music. Only the separate tone piece had a form coherent in itself; and this was derived from absolute-musical good pleasure, maintained by custom, and imposed upon the poet as an iron yoke' [In music drama] 'In their suggestive, their ever-warranted return, analogous to that of the Stabreim, the chief motives of the dramatic action – having become distinguishable melodic moments which fully materialize their content – now mould themselves into a continuous artistic form. The new form of dramatic music will have the unity of the symphonic movement; and this it will attain by spreading itself over the whole drama, in the most intimate cohesion therewith, not merely over single smaller, arbitrarily selected parts. So that this unity consists in a tissue of root themes pervading all the drama, themes which contrast, complete, reshape, divorce, and intertwine with one another as in the symphonic movement; only that here the needs of the dramatic action dictate the laws of parting and combining, which were there originally borrowed from the motions of the dance.' (229-30)

GERMAN ART FOR A GERMAN PEOPLE

Hans Sachs, final address to the people in *Die Meistersinger* Act III scene 2

Beware! Evil tricks threaten us:
If the German people and kingdom should decay
under a false foreign rule
soon no prince would understand his people
And foreign mists with foreign vanities
They would plant in our German land
What is German and true none would know it, if it
did not live in the honour of German Masters.
Therefore I say to you:
Honour your German masters
Then you will conjure up good spirits!
And if you favour their endeavours,
Even if the Holy Roman Empire
Should dissolve in mist,
For us there would yet remain
Holy German Art!

DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN

Bühnenfestspiel für drei Tage und einen Vorabend

Stage festival play over three days and a preceding evening

Arthur Rackham, ‘Brünnhilde’

- *Das Rheingold* (The Rhine gold)
- *Die Walküre* (The Valkyrie)
- *Siegfried* (Siegfried)
- *Götterdämmerung* (Downfall/Twilight of the gods)

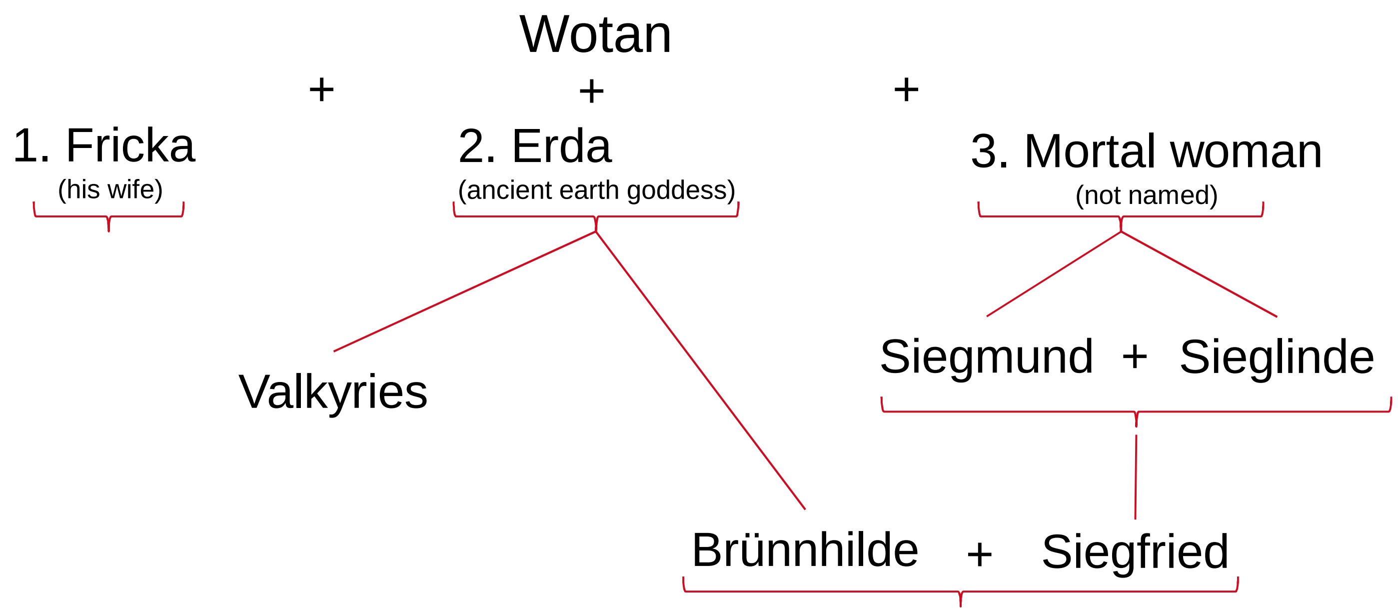
Wagner first sketched *Siegfrieds Tod* (later *Götterdämmerung*) as early as 1848. In 1851, he conceived the idea of prefacing it with *Der junge Siegfried* (later *Siegfried*), and subsequently with the first two. Composition of the music began in 1853, and was completed after several interruptions in 1874

DIE WALKÜRE ACT III, SCENE III (ENDING)

Background: Wotan, the head of the gods, has been complicit in the theft of the Rhinemaidens' gold (out of which a ring has been made), and falls victim to Alberich's curse. At the end of *Rheingold*, he conceived the idea of fathering a free hero who could rectify matters, as he himself was bound by the oaths on which his power rested. Two of his mortal children, the Wälsung twins Siegmund and Sieglinde, fall in love, and he is forced to condemn them. Wotan sends his warrior-maiden daughter, Brünnhilde, to kill Siegmund in combat, but she is touched by pity, and helps the pair instead. Siegmund is killed after Wotan's direct intervention, but the pregnant Sieglinde escapes.

Act III, scene 3: Wotan passes judgement on Brünnhilde: she is to be stripped of her divinity, cast into a sleep, to be the prize of the first passerby. Brünnhilde pleads that she was only guilty of carrying out Wotan's real wishes. Wotan is moved by this, and decrees that her sleeping form should be surrounded with fire, which only the bravest of mortal warriors would be able to pass.

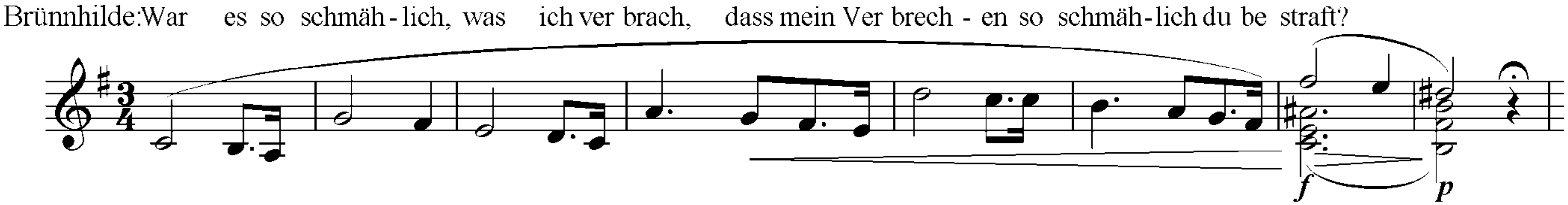
THE TANGLED FAMILY TREE IN THE *RING*

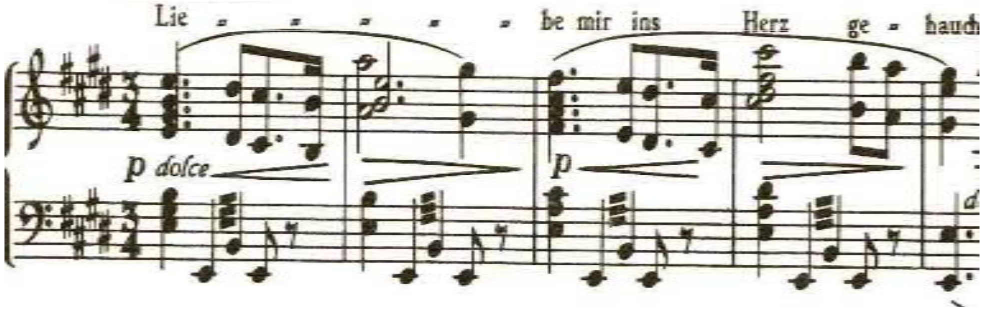


Incestuous consequences:

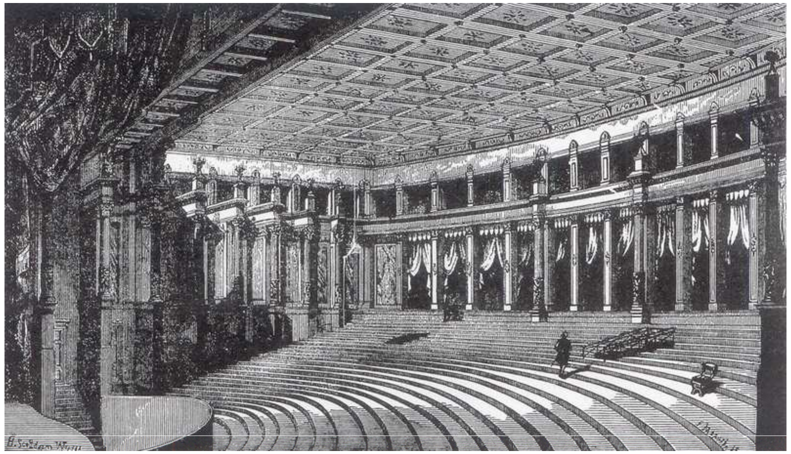
- Brünnhilde is Siegfried’s aunt
- Sieglinde is Siegfried’s mother and his aunt; Siegmund his father and uncle
- Wotan is Siegfried’s grandfather and father-in-law and great-uncle

MOTIVIC INTERRELATIONS





WAGNER'S FESTSPIELHAUS AT BAYREUTH



Engraving of interior by Édouard Schuré (1875)

The Theatre 'on the Green Hill' today

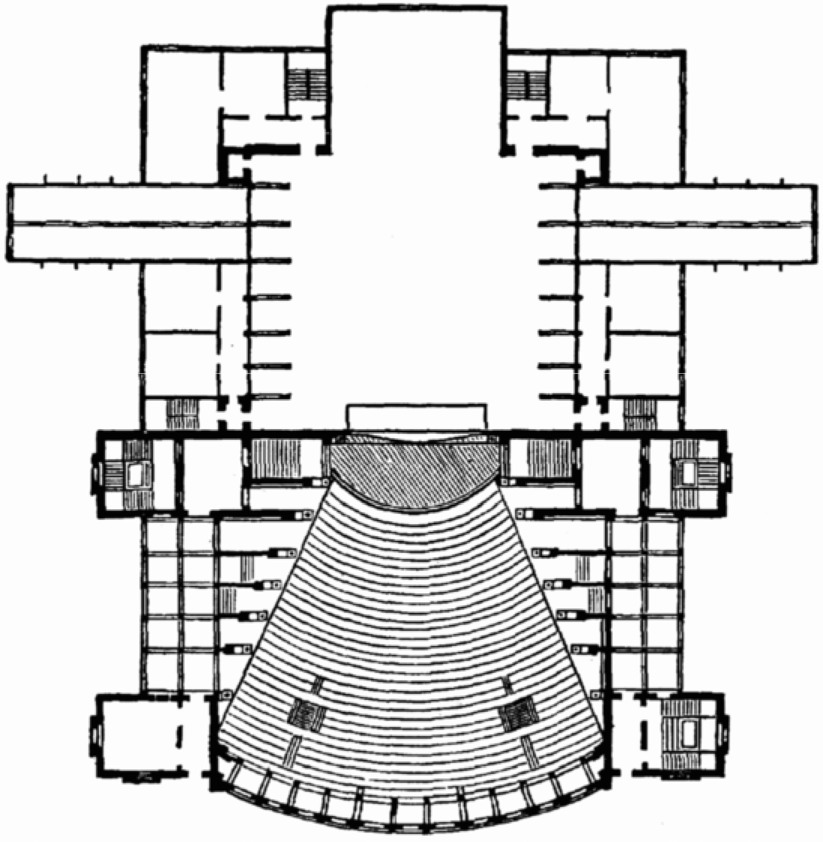
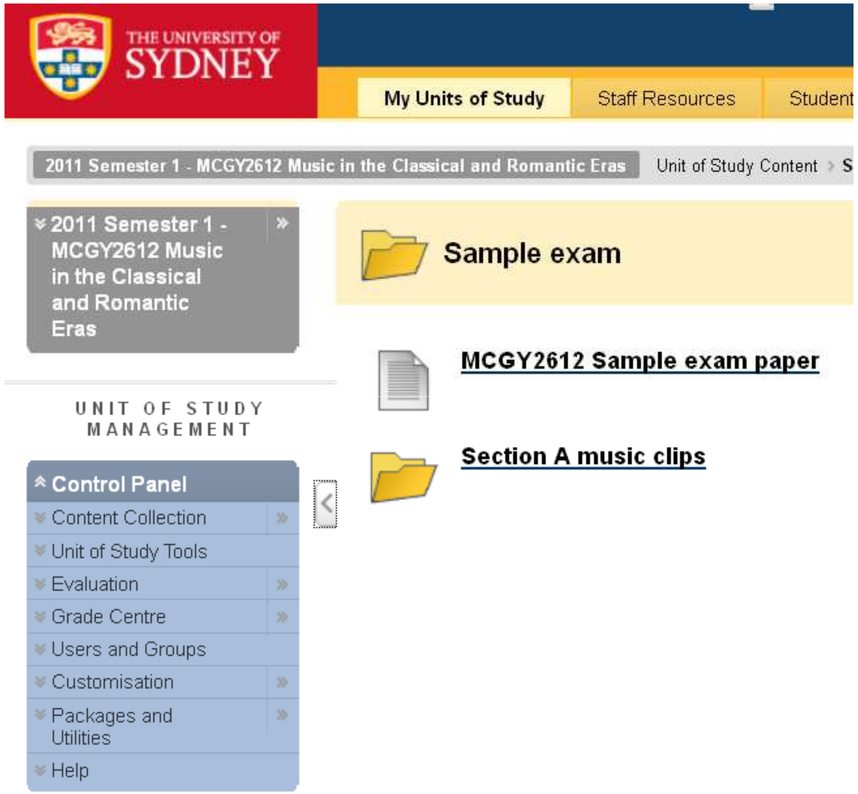


Fig. 4. Richard Wagners Bühnenfeſtſpielhaus zu Baireuth (Arch. Brückwald).

Layout of interior

SAMPLE EXAM AVAILABLE ON THE WEBSITE